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Ohio State University Undergraduate Honors Thesis

# Narrative Considerations on Social Media

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## Introduction

In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, H. Porter Abbott defines a narrative as a “representation of events” (12). Such a definition is like a fractal: simple and comprehensible in the macro and increasingly complex as deeper levels bordering the microscopic are visually and narratively penetrated. In understanding and internalizing the foundations of narrative, we begin its deconstruction; or, as modernist writers such as James Joyce might have put it, in studying exactly how stories are put together and how they work, we engage in the creative destruction of established form. Making "creative destruction" all the more imperative today is the ongoing revolution in social interaction taking place through the advent of new media. The consistent availability of new media platforms, while redefining the nature of human relationships, is simultaneously opening avenues for writers to challenge the conventions of storytelling – and in the process necessitating new approaches to the study of narrative.

Author Jennifer Egan was awarded the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for her fiction piece *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. In a PBS *NewsHour* interview about Egan's success, Jeffery Brown (the interviewer) noted:

“...earlier I used the word "novel," and there is this the sort of inevitable question about what it is that you've written here. There are stories, they are linked, but they are not linked even in a normal way, if there is such a thing as normal. It's not plotted as a kind of standard novel...”

As Brown's comments suggest, Egan's episodic narrative has been extremely provocative in breaking with past storytelling tradition. In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Egan incorporates contemporary methods of written communication and presentation, weaving text messages, texting shorthand, and powerpoint slides into her prose, alongside her "normal" or traditional prose. But is this literature? Is it even a narrative?

Along similar lines, *The Metaphysical Touch* by Sylvia Brownrigg, is a story about a virtual love affair. Told through an exchange of e-mails, the novel was written in 1999, gracing the literary scene at the advent of e-mail's rise in popular use. Brownrigg explores the narrative effects of e-mail communication on relationships (both internal and external) through Pi, the main female character. Pi discovers the liberality of a communication that she likens to eavesdropping on her own thoughts.<sup>1</sup> However, in garnering critical attention, Brownrigg's novel receive much less notice from average readers. The contrasting popular success of Egan's novel, with its own incorporation of modes of now “outdated” computer-mediated communication, may then be due in part to its temporal distance from the beginning of these technological advancements. To a degree, phrases like “*c u l8tr*” and presentations utilizing Microsoft Powerpoint are becoming obsolete in today's academic, business and social contexts. Could it be that narratives can accommodate technological innovations only after they start to become outmoded? If so, what does this mean in terms of how we define ourselves in relation to our environment, to other people?

And how, if narrative is the representation of events, will these technological shifts affect how we interpret the story that is our lives?

## Objectives

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<sup>1</sup> “It was quiet; it didn't require immediate response, as a voice on the telephone did; it was in her familiar medium, print, so it emerged through the loved language of her fingertips. But it didn't require a physical body of print on paper. Ontologically, e-mail was not in any recognizable category: neither voice nor paper, neither pure mind nor pure matter” (Brownrigg).

Through writing an experimental novel playing with the definition of narrative and character via 21<sup>st</sup> century methods of communication, the primary objective of this research thesis is to explore the contributions of media to the perception of characters' personal and public lives in relation to self and others. H. Porter Abbott writes, “it is only through narrative that we know ourselves as active entities that operate through time” (130). We engage better with the self and with others if those relationships were interpreted through the lens of a character. One method for gaining insight into the effect of media on the perception of personal and public life is to create a narrative which examines exactly that. This thesis aims to understand the effects of the technological age on narrative and ultimately on contemporary society.

In turn, by incorporating a variety of narrative tidbits via social-media platforms - Twitter tweets, hashtags, online-checking receipts, GoogleCalendar notifications, Facebook posts, blog comments, friend requests, QR codes, Tumblr posts, LinkedIn Profiles, iPhone commands, SMS messages, Pinterest Pins - my thesis will secondarily aim to define the intersection of narrative discourse and reader response by seeking feedback from a wide range of readers who engage with the text at all stages of its development

My project will also include a "coda" discussing discoveries made during the process of producing the experimental novel. In this part of the project, I will aim to address questions such as “To what degree does social media contribute to the narrative that explains our private and public lives?” and “What can the contents of a grocery cart reveal about someone--or for that matter, the deviations of the items in the cart from those on his list?” and finally “How do we push the boundaries of narrative to explore the most cutting-edge, innovative ways people are connecting with each other?”



## **Methods**

Preliminary research for the experimental novel and the scholarly "coda" will begin with an analysis of the narrativity of the social media platforms Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, et al. in the form of a review similar to that of scientific literary reviews. Sources will include a diverse array of texts (novels, short stories, hypertexts, serialized novel) which have attempted to incorporate different media outlets at their advent into society such as the epistolary novel (written in the form of documents such as letters, e-mails, blog posts). An analysis of texts such as this will illuminate how authors and readers responded to new technological advances in the field of communication as well as how these "mixed media" texts were received--whether they met with literary acclaim or became lost in obscurity. Ultimately, these results will influence my construction of the experimental text and also my assessment of how it sheds light on contemporary communicative practices.

## Significance

As globalization progresses, per capita incomes rise and fall, information is shared, and technological advances continue to chronotopically define youth and age, social media will remain pertinent to the organization and routine of our daily lives. Such media will also come to determine, if they have not done so already, how we choose to spend our time. Already a mammoth influence in the business world, and in the marketing and branding of any personality, company or institution, social media have influenced contemporary consciousness in ways that still need to be investigated and analyzed. Ruth Page writes, “the development of social media formats in the first decade of the twenty-first century has enabled people to document the stories of their daily experiences in online, public or semi-public domains in unprecedented measure” (i). [#unprecedented](#). The study of social media use has only just begun. Statistics such as the demographics of users as well as user patterns have recently been gathered for analysis. The activity and volume of social media use has only including the demographics and patterns of users. However, social media has not been studied in the way that I propose to in this research project. My research thesis will combine scholarly, critical analysis, experimental writing, and sociological perspectives on stories and storytelling to gain an understanding of the addictive principles of social media, why we have chosen to enter into a virtual relationship which has begun to change the way we engage with our identity, and how these dynamics are now playing out in the narratives of our contemporary moment.

## Reading List

### Novels/Narratives

- ♣ Michael Joyce, *Afternoon* (1987); the first hypertext narrative (or so they say)
- ♣ Sylvia Brownrigg, *The Metaphysical Touch* (1999); novel about email/the Internet
- ♣ Walter Kirn, *The Unbinding* (2006); published serially on the online magazine *Slate*
- ♣ Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010); Pulitzer Prize winner 2011

### Books of Narrative Theory:

- ♣ Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* (2006); much-discussed book on cognition, narrative, and character
- ♣ Ruth Page, *Stories and Social Media* (2011); narratological research done on several different social media platforms
- ♣ Ruth Page and Bronwen Thomas, eds., *New Narratives: Stories and Storytelling in the Digital Age*; a continuation and expansion on the above text
- ♣ H. Porter Abbott, *A Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2006); foundational text on narrative

Representative Feedback from reader Kenny Gould, English major from Duke University

August 6, 2013

Things I noticed:

I think you need a little more background on Phelan's distinctions, and I'm not sure I understand what you mean by, "to expose the shortcomings of mortality."

In my opinion, I think the brilliance of your research hinges on the fact that [Pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com) is written in the same sentence as *The Dead*. Maybe milk that?

September 11, 2013

Ha:

"Freddy is just really mellow everyone thinks he's a recreational stoner. I know he doesn't do it very often, I don't think. He's just so smart, everyone is waiting for him to do something, to make something or invent something. It's like they all think he's going to wake up one day and change the world. And who knows? Maybe he will, but I think he's so much smarter than all of us, like Picasso who could paint cartoons and convince the public they were worth thousands of dollars, and Freddy is making a difference, it just isn't the way we are seeing it. I read Siddhartha a few months ago on my own and there's a part in it where Siddhartha goes to learn about love. (I should have thought about this earlier, could have saved me from myself.) And Siddhartha meets the most beautiful woman in the world. She says to him, Siddhartha, you are so fortunate in this world, it seems like doors just open for you wherever you go. You should be happy. And he says, that's the way it looks, but really I have done the work to open the doors. Or something like that. The point is that he takes the initiative before anyone tells him to. And all we see is the end result of a lifetime of planning, curiosity and gumption. So it is with Freddy. I think."

I made a few comments, but overall I think this has been one of your strongest sections. It's full of philosophy but is not overbearing, and the protagonist is likeable, and funny.

(Attached)

The last thing I want to do is be here right now. We're all getting ready to sit down at the table for dinner and Mom has just calmed down to the point where she can engage in conversation with civility.

That is, only after I set the table and poured everyone's drinks like Her Royal Majesty yelled at me to do. To be fair, she did ask me to do it before she left for the airport to pick up Freddy and Kate and I forgot because I was playing xbox against my nemesis, catman582 who I've discovered is a 53 year old veteran from Nashville, retired young, three daughters, a wife and a huge bank account thanks to people wanting to shrink wrap their suitcases before international flights. Basically he invented a machine which wraps up pieces of luggage tightly in clear plastic cellophane and charges an absurd amount for peace of mind. I guess we'll pay anything for that. How did I find out his real identity? Easy. The internet, of course. I mean, it might be hard to steal someone's identity, although let's be honest that isn't exactly too too hard to do these days – I have a friend, Mark Simon, who can access his parents' email, online bank statements, deleted web history (his Dad is into pom apparently, or his mom – he's working on getting the credit information on that) all by a program he wrote and installed on his home computer and both of his parent's laptops. All of their devices are Macs and work off of the iCloud, so he just has this whole other user on his personal laptop set up exclusively to spy on his parents. I mean, the kid has a lot of time on his hands, obviously, and he doesn't play sports or anything, but he's brilliant and hacking is better than pot to him. So I took some tips from watching him at his work and found out, with relative ease, that my arch foe, this catman582, is really some old dude who just likes to play video games. We're connected on LinkedIn. Well he and my Dad are. 3<sup>rd</sup> degree connection, but who cares? My Dad never checks his profile, but luckily he has me to update his newest accomplishments. Like the International Continence Society (ICS) conference in October he went to because he got a paper accepted. The conference was in China! I wish I could have gone with him, but it was pretty expensive and I had soccer and Olivia – what a dumb thing for me to have considered, oh I can't go halfway across the world to an amazing place that's thousands on thousands of years old because I have to make some headway with Olivia before Connor Price does? Man was I a sucker, well I've moved on, I'll never do that again. So next October, I'm definitely going if he gets something accepted, no questions asked. So unbeknownst to my father, he's actually a pretty popular guy, I've got to hand it to myself – and to him, I guess – together, well sort of together, we've made Dr. Graham Bloome, MD quite the LinkedIn maven. I've been directing all of his messages and notifications to my email so I manage everything and he doesn't have a clue. I know he'll thank me someday. My next project is my mom's social media status. She's getting better but her tweets are too personal – the golden ratio of Twitter is 80% business or what you're selling, which in mom's case as in many personal user accounts, is persona – some people want to be funny, so they're selling comedy, some people want to project themselves as intelligent and worldly, so they sell knowledge or wisdom, and some people want to be associated specifically with a club or organization, like, Freddy for example, he's got his shit down pat – he's with the D.O.C. And tweets a lot about what they're doing and planning and how to be more involved, so I know as a follower that if I ever want to know what's *really* going on at the D.O.C. I can just search for Freddy and read his tweets. And there are tons more categories of users, of course, as there are fish in the sea or birds in the sky. But mom's problem is that she's all over the place. So first, 80% business, then and only once you've mastered the business side of things can you move into the 20% personal tweeting. Like people want to know you're human, they want to put some sort of personality to the persona you're trying to create. It's a bit like manipulation, or lying. But really, it's just a way to build Klout. Not clout, Klout, the measure of your online influence. You can link up your Tumblr,

Comment [KennyGou1]: Of?

Comment [KennyGou2]: YES!

Comment [KennyGou3]: I like the fact that Silas doesn't explain how he knows. Any savvy reader will know he used the internet, especially when he says, "We're connected on LinkedIn. I feel like it adds to his character (and to his youth) if he doesn't explain."

You don't know how to find out someone's information? What are you, old or something?



blogger accounts, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc into the site and it'll chum out a score from 1 to 100 saying how influential you are in cyberspace. I guess you can put the number on your resume now or something? I don't really know, I'm only in eighth grade and only just got a laptop. All of my friends got iPads when they came out and have had the iPhone 3 for ages, though luckily my parents waited to get me the 4S version. Better believe I was the talk of school for a while. I can't wait to get the 5, though, it looks so cool. Some people, girls especially, think it's too big, but whatever, they probably just want it to fit in a purse or something. As long as it fits in my back pocket, I don't care how big it is.

**Comment [Kenny Gou4]:** How does he know how to do so much and he just got a laptop? I see what you're trying to do, but I'm not sure if it's believable.

I've devised this way of telling if a girl is worth it or not, worth trying to get to go out with you, I mean. And I just came up with it after being humiliated by Olivia today at lunch. God that was awful, I don't even want to think about what an idiot she is – to think I would just bow at her feet and give her my answers that I worked hard on? No way. We all learned a hard lesson today. But revenge was sweet I guess, in the form of her being destroyed by Mr. W in science when she didn't have anything to turn in. It was a huge assignment and we knew about the project like a month ago so she didn't have any excuses other than no one would help her cheat today. Merry Christmas from Karma. That would be worse than coal. What if kids got karma in their stockings, I wonder what it would look like. Probably it would be their worst nightmares. Or maybe not, maybe it would be good karma and for the next couple of weeks or months their days would be filled with pies and cinnamon and hot cider and gingerbread men. Well that could be nice.

But you can tell if a girl is girlfriend material if 1. she doesn't carry a purse, 2. try to talk about electronics or anything boy-related if she clearly knows nothing about it, and 3. is smart. I know a lot of the actually intelligent girls in my grade are ugly, but Freddy told me earlier, after I told him what happened with Olivia, that I just should wait because in high school, girls get pretty and athletic and the ones you really want to watch for are the ones that don't buy into the whole materialistic consumer culture, which falls in line with rule #1 – no purses. You have a backpack, why do you need a purse? We aren't buying anything, this isn't the mall, you don't have that much make-up (or shouldn't) that would require schlepping another small bag around, and what else could you need it for? Maybe feminine supplies, ew, that I would understand. But for heaven's sake – every day? I'm pretty sure I learned in health class that that whole alacazam stuff only comes around once a month. So the bottomline is that purses are just unnecessary at the middle school level. Moms, okay, you're a mom, you get an automatic pass on every fashion or accessory choice. Listen to me, I sound like Mom or Kate. Who are the main two reasons I don't want to be at home.

One can only imagine one way Inigo and Freddy became such good friends only knowing each other for half an hour. That 30 min was spent driving home from the airport, with my mother and older sister. Apart, they are angels. Together, tygers. I don't know what it is about mothers and their daughters but I'm not going to attempt to understand it here. I'll quit while I'm ahead thanks. So poor Inigo, who is actually a stellar guy – his accent is awesome and he looks like an older Prince Caspian. Whatever, I used to be really into the Chronicles of Namia. Who am I kidding, I still am. Anyways, Inigo is from Spain and I don't know how he and Kate met, I forget now, but good for her. He's a financial analyst for European soccer leagues like La Liga and the Premier League, how awesome is that? And he gets to go to games for free. And. Sit. In. A. Box. Boom. He gets my vote. #winning

Letter to Prospective Publisher Nicole Aragi

**YOLO**  
Meaghan Novi  
Columbus, OH 43201

16 October 2012

Nicole Aragi  
143 West 27th Street, #4F  
New York, New York 10001

Dear Ms. Aragi,

*How do we push the boundaries of narrative to explore the most cutting-edge, innovative ways people are connecting with each other?*

Originating from an academic research grant to explore the relationship between social media and our present social consciousness, *YOLO* (You Only Live Once) is a novel of intersections. The 24-hr story takes place on December 21st, 2012 - the day of the so-called apocalypse - situating the Bloome family (Graham, Rosemary, Katherine, Freddy and Silas) against a doom which may or may not exist. However, in light of the #apocalypse, the upper-middle-class characters engage with issues of cynicism, ambivalence and parenthood.

Playing with Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest platforms, this novel places traditional prose in, around and beside the new media which now influence much of the contemporary moment. Additionally, I include content that is formatted to a mobile device - e.g. in the first chapter Rosemary Bloome reads an article on her iPhone then switches to an iPad which is represented by a picture of the device (proportionally sized) with text on the page.

A third-year in the Ohio State University's English Department studying Narrative and Narrative Theory, I have had the opportunity for several scholars in the field of Narrative as well as Creative Writing professors and MFA students to review my manuscript. My undergraduate and graduate career in English literature has been to study, analytically and creatively, canonical works and works which challenge literary conventions. As new platforms open in digital and online media, human communication is similarly being redefined. It has been the subject of my thesis to tease out such relationships and to determine what will "sell" and what literature falls flat in the face of obsolescence or over-experimentation.

I have been previously published in *McSweeney's* and am well-connected to the 600,000 + existing alumni and student network that is The Ohio State University.

My objective is to challenge how we see literature and to what extent can the creation of a "Facebook Event" be accepted as a narrative. This is a distinguishing work for its innovative formatting and juxtaposition of characters' interior minds with their on- and off-line lives.

I have attached the first two chapters of the novel, a full manuscript is available and I would be happy to send it along if you are interested.

Thank you for your time.

Stay well,

Meaghan Novi

**Queries <Queries@aragi.net>**

To: Meaghan Novi

RE: YOLO

October 17, 2012 5:07 PM

[Inbox - novi.3@buckeyemail.osu.edu](#) **2**

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Dear Ms. Novi,

Thank you for your interest in working with Aragi Inc. Sadly, however, Nicole Aragi has a full client list and is not taking on new work at the moment.

We wish you the best of luck in securing another agent.

All best,

Lisa Smith

[See More from Meaghan Novi](#)



## Letter from Prospective Publisher William Clark

**Meaghan Novi**

To: William Clark

Re: YOLO / Partial Manuscript

October 16, 2012 5:35 AM

[Sent Mail](#)

Dear Mr. Clark,

Thank you for the encouraging words. I appreciate you taking the time to read my work. I look forward to connecting in the future.

Best,

Meaghan Novi

[See More from William Clark](#)**William Clark**

To: Meaghan Novi

YOLO / Partial Manuscript

October 8, 2012 4:51 AM

[Inbox - Gmail](#) 1

Thanks for sending your partial manuscript. Unfortunately, I do not feel that I could be the best advocate for your work. Please keep in mind that mine is a subjective business, and an idea or story to which one agent does not respond may well be met with great enthusiasm by another, and I encourage you to continue writing to agents. Hopefully you will find someone who will get behind you and your work with the conviction necessary in the current market.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

William Clark  
Wm CLARK ASSOCIATES

Mid-Thesis Reflection Paper - Autumn Semester  
December 9, 2012

Revisiting the original questions raised in proposing my thesis, I have found that over the course of the last semester some have been answered circuitously while others have yet to be engaged.

My inspiration for the creative novel, *YOLO*, is Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. To this end, I wanted to know "does her text then truly count as literature? Is it even a narrative?" Judging by my experience integrating Facebook posts, Tweets and text messaging, I can answer that "Yes, sort of." These types of integrated media do present us with a narrative. At least the way I incorporated Twitter and text messaging and the iPad image in Chapter 1 - this is "easy to read" and follow as a narrative thread. (This brings up another question - to what degree am I writing this novel for the popular reader/audience or for a scholar/critic?) I can't say the same about the chapter written entirely in Facebook - where Freddy sets up his Facebook account and invites his friends to an Apocalypse party. It has proven difficult to set up that sort of "image-only" chapter without situating plain text around it. Diegetically, it doesn't make sense for a chapter to stand alone without an explanation - or at the very least, a Facebook chapter because while there are indicators relating to character (details like hair color, style, interests, etc.) there is a lot of work the reader needs to do to make the chapter "fit" or make sense within the greater narrative. This puts the reader "in control" - hinting to Michael Joyce's *Afternoon*, where the reader is able to physically direct the momentum of the story by clicking. From workshopping the piece with a few classmates (chosen for their candid feedback) it was easier to understand the chapter (which originally was just by itself) written in Pinterest when it was situated within the larger chapter where Katherine is getting ready for her flight to New York.

I've got some work to do, to fit in Freddy's chapter so it is better streamlined with *YOLO* and the overall arc of the narrative. Two questions I asked in my proposal were: "Could it be that narratives can accommodate technological innovations only after they start to become outmoded? If so, what does this mean in terms of how we define ourselves in relation to our environment, to other people?" These I am still trying to come to a conclusion on, though through playing with how to represent text messages, I am finding that images (such as the image of the iPhone instead of plain text for texting) of technology that are "still in daily use" are difficult to engage with for the reader. It is easier to comprehend the narrative if it has the "look and feel" of a narrative, that is, of a traditional novel.

Finally, writing a novel which occurs in the future has also presented challenges of content. December 21, 2012 is the day of the "Mayan Apocalypse" - the day that is rumored to be the end of the world because the Mayan calendar (written on stone tablets) ends. What type of significance does this day hold in the lives of the Bloome's? None, however #apocalypse2012 functions as a cohesive unit (a "trend"). The hashtag is supposed to anchor each chapter in the present, a present which is broken up in the narrative by different tenses and perspectives.

Looking forward, the analytical research, the "academic coda" will define the next semester. I have applied for a couple undergraduate conferences to present *YOLO*, and I will continue to ask for feedback from professors and readers alike.

## **Academic Coda**

### *Understanding the effects of the Technological Age on Narrative and Contemporary Society*

Part 1. “To what degree does social media contribute to the narrative that explains our private and public lives?”

Part 2. “How do we push the boundaries of narrative to explore the most cutting-edge, innovative ways people are connecting with each other?”

*Part I- Social Media/Social Networks*

*Twitter, Character, and Persona*

Social media presents and intersection of character and persona. Ruth Page states, “the development of social media formats in the first decade of the twenty-first century has enabled people to document the stories of their daily experiences in online, public or semi-public domains in unprecedented measure” (i). The social media eruption has pervaded every crevice of contemporary sensibility, subsequently revolutionizing perceptions of identity. Persona, the artificial creation of character, is now achievable through the use of any social media platform and bloated with numbers of users outlets such as Facebook are garnering greater attention and activity. Twitter, “the fastest, simplest way to stay close to everything you care about,” is one social media platform which visually represents the juxtaposition of character and persona (Twitter.com).

Launched in July of 2006, Twitter now has over 300 million users worldwide. Pitched as a micro-blogging site, users communicate with their Twitter posse, or Followers, through “tweets” which are 140-characters-or-less phrases, sentences, pictures, questions, links, suggestions or responses to another's tweet. Similarly, the de-differentiation of systems of knowledge was championed by Jean Baudrillard. His theory of postmodernism viewed modernity as an explosion of commodification, mechanization, technology and market relations whereas postmodernity was an implosion of boundaries, regions, and divisions between high and low culture, appearance and physical reality (xi). The new age of network fiction may be the intersection of modernity and postmodernity, according to Baudrillard's definitions. As one of the most successful and popular social media sits, Twitter is the platform of hyper-self-validation

which justifies the continuous expression of statuses and updates, as well as a packageable forum for online content sharing.

Although the narrative opportunities to be explored through the networked lens surrounding Twitter are many, this section of the thesis seeks to analyze the collision of character and persona, the specific network of personal-branding, which occurs when the user's given name is shown, in black bolded font, next to his Twitter name in regular, grey font when he tweets. The pattern is continued when a user views his homepage seeing tweets by the entities (people, institutions, etc) he is following; the public name is bolded while the Twitter username is not. Thus, the intersection of character and persona is enhanced by the networked and nuanced narrative implications of a user being defined by his given name and Twitter username in the same time and space.

When a user first signs up for Twitter, he is prompted to give the standard Profile information such as Name, Birthdate, Sex, username and password. Immediately, he must decide what will separate him from the next John\_Doe. His username will be used when Followers choose to include him in their tweets or tweet @ him, searched for when new or old acquaintances type it in the Search Twitter bar, and judged when potential employers do their homework. His friends may admire his creativity, class or sense of humor when the subject comes up in conversation, which it inevitably will if he is joining the Twitter world “late in the game.” He will eventually find himself at a carrefour of character and persona. While he is the mastermind behind his username, tweets, pictures and Followers, is this truly John\_Doe11 or John Doe? The answer, for Twitter users, is not so clear cut.

When John\_Doe11 logs into his home screen he will see **John Doe** in the top left hand

corner under which displays the number of tweets, number of users he is Following and number of Followers.<sup>2</sup> In no capacity on the home page is his username permanently shown (it would only be visible if someone tagged him in a recent tweet) and the clue which grounds John Doe in revealing Twitter as only a media platform, an appendix to reality and not reality itself, has conveniently been omitted. The user who logs in as John\_Doe11 enters a world where he is John Doe again, a psychological monopoly in bold.

For John Doe, as for any Twitter user, character and persona are made an instant issue. In defining his character to his self, to his Followers, and to his generation, John Doe must reconcile with John\_Doe11. Or not. In literature, a character may become someone else, an alter ego as in *Jekyll and Hyde* or another gender as in *Twelfth Night*. This may be by choice or happenstance, or subconsciously. Nevertheless it is an outcome specific to narrative and the network of Twitter. David Ciccoricco in his *Reading Network Fiction* asserts that a networked narrative differs by way of the emergence of its narrative, that is “gradually through a recombination of elements” (6). In the case of a Twitter account, the transitional exposure of a narrative parallels the Twitter user's shift through the creation of a personal network and the broadening of that network to connect with others' personal and professional networks.

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2

Fanon's *On Violence* is one text which may be used to critically approach Twitter's engagement with “following” and “followers.” To a degree, this online platform microcosmically represents the colonialism – the colonizers being those who are being followed and the colonized, those who “follow.” However, the difference (explainable by this modern movement of networkism) between colonialism and social media is derived from the ability of the media user to play the role of both colonizer and colonized. Fanon writes on the interdependence of these two parties, though one seems to be in control and the other trying to gain control, one cannot function without the other. He writes that the age of imperialism, still ongoing, is riddled with contradiction and paradox. Likewise, the life of a Twitter user, perhaps any user of social media, is plagued by the Jekyll and Hyde of character and persona. Homi K. Bhabha explored this intersection as an expression of “mimicry.” He writes, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a different that is almost the same, but not quite.” With regards to Twitter, personal narrative issues of character and persona are manifestations of colonial mimicry. Bhabha believes mimicry to be a form of containment whereas networkism defines such mimicry as a force of extension.

Looking past the initial conflict of identity accompanying Twitter use, the next stage of John Doe's Twitter experience would be to ignore the instability of an emerging persona and press forward with activity. (It is important to note that not all Twitter users “progress” at the same rate - in fact the trajectory of Twitter use is most comparable to the demographic shift of different nations which occurs in a time frame completely unique to a region or socioeconomic level.) When he tweets, John\_Doe11 / John Doe will again see his given name in black, bold letters to the left of @John\_Doe11 in grey font. The political spectrum pits fascism as the far right and socialism as the far left due to the fact that society tends to visually perceive anything “right” as less developed than anything to the “left.” In this respect, the integrity of John\_Doe11 / John Doe's given name in symbolizing his character is called into question. Instead, the spatial placement of his username suggests its superiority accurately indicating his character. That said, the boldness of John\_Doe11 / John Doe's given name seems to function as highlighting its trump card status. Visually, this separation stands out as exaggerated; in no capacity on the Twitter page is there more of a visual contrast than that of the spatial and visual representation of given names and user names. Alluding to the conflict between implied character via given name and username, the bold, black versus light, grey font serves to undermine their differences in such a way that these differences may be a product of hyperbole. The dichotomy of character, both in its original definition of representing physical letters and in its definition of human nature, between a given name and username as manifested by the tweet is



thus not a dichotomy at all but an attempted, convincing expression of mimicry.<sup>3</sup>



The spatial arrangement of John\_Doe11 / John Doe's given name and his username further contributes to the narrativity of Twitter. Jeopardizing the status of a name which has faithfully protected and preserved an identity for years in relation to its redefinition, its falsification, within weeks skews the center of a Twitter user's sense of identity-gravity. H. Porter Abbott writes, "it is only through narrative that we know ourselves as active entities that operate through time" (130). Thus is it only through the continuation of the Twitter user's narrative that he can have any way of internalizing or making sense of the narrative shift that has occurred.

Stage three of Twitter use is characterized by the welding of John\_Doe11 / John Doe. The notion of persona, of a facade existing alongside character, has disappeared and the John\_Doe11 / John Doe virtual/physical personality becomes one. John\_Doe11's use of Twitter may dwindle or stagnate as the development of his Twitter identity is complete and the personality that is John\_Doe11 has finally been established. John\_Doe11 is at a loss to understand why, when he logs into his Twitter homepage, he has nothing to tweet. He begins to

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<sup>3</sup> In Michael Joyce's *Afternoon*, a hypertext fiction novel Ciccoricco has also termed a work of "network fiction," a car accident is seen from several different perspectives. Each character is challenged in a multi-nodal fashion to come to terms with his or her character and persona, most of which exist in the novel as two separate entities. The dilemma of a split network is an example of further diegetic levels and also a phenomenon unique to network fiction known as "arboreal" narrative. In arboreal narratives, including videogames in which the player has control over the next move or ultimate ending, the narrative emerges through a series of plot-able choices which the reader, to some extent, has the power to determine. Twitter can function in a very similar way as the progression of John Doe's Twitter use indicates.

question the content of his tweets, realizing that the demographic of his Followers includes adults, professionals and colleagues. While a part of him may feel depressed at having to curb his John\_Doe11 brand-inspired tweets, he knows one subjectively proven technique will be to stay away from tweeting foolishly as some of his Following do, clearly posting in an inebriated or mind-altered state.

In contrast to Stages 1 and 2 of Twitter use, John\_Doe11 will ultimately come to accept Twitter in Stage 3 for what it truly is: a social media platform. Social in its broad reach of number and diversity of users, Media in its virtual existence and Platform in the respect that Twitter is also an online forum where ideas, comments and other types of media can be shared openly. He is still perceived as John\_Doe11 by his Followers, but the surreality of Twitter has polarized John\_Doe11 against his Self, his given name is obsolete, being absorbed into John\_Doe11. This re-ignition of conflict between character and persona serves to further underline the narrative dynamism of Twitter.

Twitter embodies the ambiguity that accompanies the networked representation of character and persona through something as simple as a given name or username. Resulting in a narrative jamming (Abbott's term), the esoteric nature of character and persona culminates with convolution and complication on all diegetic and networked, those are, personal and individual, levels. In its spatial placement of a user's given name and username, whether strategic or purely aesthetic, the genius of Twitter originates in its ability to blur the user's perception of himself, his online identity and his publicly accessible network. Effective in narratives such as *Memento*, the problematic relationship between character and persona is a narrative tool which significantly contributes to building and sustaining narrativity. To wit, Twitter has normalized persona; the

deconstruction of character into separate networks. Stepping into that persona becomes increasingly trendy as the stages of Twitter use progress. Yet as our lives are driven by the narrative experience, the power to completely manipulate, change, reinvent our own character, and engage with the volume of networks available via the ease of virtual reality, has become more than a mere trend. It is a movement bordering on addiction.



The momentum of the social media age has made it possible for this narrative jamming to proceed without hesitation or question; the implications are numerous, as will be the societal consequences. In the literary realm, how twenty-first century characters engage with their identity will almost certainly be dictated to a degree by their use of social media and reliance upon networks for guidance, knowledge and motive. This generation, likewise, may begin to internalize the marriage of character and persona, losing the ability to discern one from the other. Already we are witnessing businesses crumble, resumes bolstered and wars fought with the use or failure to tap into societal-sphere networks, especially those provided exclusively by social media. With the increased use of media platforms and the narratological and networked properties of these social media platforms, the effects of character and persona may not be a complete misfortune. We as a technological generation may come to perceive the online projections of our character, our virtual personas, as exhibiting narrative merit. We may even embrace life as a narrative, as we begin to embrace networking as a way of being.

Part 2 – Form and Function

*Pushing Narrative Boundaries, Defining Contemporary Communication*

In the age of communication, the world's largest social media platform, Facebook (with a following of over 1 billion active users) is the home of thousands of online exchanges between people. It may be a fault of social media sites' natures, however, that with rising access and volume of internet platforms designed to “connect (you) with friends and the world around you,” the market's saturation may be doing just the opposite (Facebook.com).

Additionally, the necessity of at least a cellular telephone, though preferably a smartphone, has dramatically increased the use of texting as a viable and professional mode of communication. For an average person to not have a cellphone with him at all times is considered going rogue or, to put it in slang, “going off the grid;” it is nearing countercultural status. As the degree of social networking online and via smartphone remains pertinent to the organization and routine of our daily lives, such entities have also come to determine with whom we choose to communicate. Already a mammoth influence in the business world, especially in the domains of marketing and branding, the presence, integration and recognition of the digital age has influenced contemporary communication enormously.

Simultaneously building up avenues of communication, “new” ways to connect, especially online, have not yet appeared in their natural form in modern literature. While, references to cell conversations, updating Facebook statuses and the like have been made, the actual representation of such communication is still finding its place among 21<sup>st</sup> century writers. And while many readers of popular narratives accept the shrinking, technocratic and globalized world in which we live, this absence of form in literature may suggest a greater point: we have

not yet accepted that technology is shaping our present social consciousness. The novel, *YOLO*, is an attempt to showcase the narrative richness that can be found in our contemporary modes of communication. It is also a digging into how our society's psyche is represented by our engagement with social media and technology.

*YOLO* examines the lives of five characters through their use of, dependence on and thoughts about technology. In short, identity is explored through media; on what mobile device and with what ease Mrs. Bloome reads the review of her restaurant, the reader's first impression of her, comes to define and parallel her own insecurities as a mother, a woman and a chef. As another example, the character of Freddy is developed through Facebook navigations – creating an event, inviting friends, etc. This is indicative of his evolving personality which is at the time superficially needy of both outward validation and social contact, also betraying his depression masquerading as Freddy's will to maintain a mysterious and rebellious aloofness.

The structure of *YOLO*, in pieces determined by character and time of day, mimics the natural breaks in a 24 hour period, while the second-person chapters reveal the times that each character is most active on his or her chosen social media platforms. For Dr. Bloome, during surgery he is cognizant of the actions of Dr. Wand, the anesthesiologist, who is always on his iPad or other mobile device playing games or checking and updating his Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn account, to name a few. Subsequently, Dr. Bloome finds minutes to contemplate his own use of social media, all while performing a highly technological and instrumental explorative operation to determine the type and stage of ovarian cancer his patient has. Similarly, after dinner while he is relaxing and listening to Silas talk about his day at school, his leisure is complemented by his deliberate avoidance of technology, choosing instead to focus on his

recently reunited family. He is aware of the vanity of technology, of the pitfalls of the current healthcare system, of being reduced to a machine-like physician to keep his job at the hospital, and finally, Dr. Bloome is aware that what is here today will be replaced by tomorrow – a cliché, but the truth all the same.

The setting of the novel was such that haste and contemplation might be achieved together. The 24-hour timeframe inherently insists on a sense of urgency for the reader and characters in that more emphasis is put on the details of the mundane to make them seem more interesting, more complex and have more of a presence than a reader would normally ascribe. The date, December 20<sup>st</sup>, 2012 or the supposed eve of the Mayan-predicted apocalypse, as the title *YOLO* (You Only Live Once), provides a (false) motivation for introspection: will my life go on or will the world truly end? And New York City, the city that never sleeps, the business center of the world, once the technological center of the world, created an environment of constant change and flux to mirror the constantly shifting landscape of the internet, social media and technology.

In experimenting with form and function, *YOLO* is the first of its kind to incorporate several modes of contemporary communication. It does not succeed in all aspects of its initial endeavors, however, in beginning a conversation about narrative, media and our ability as a society to understand ourselves through the literature we produce mimetically, the novel remains true to its promises.

## Annotated Bibliography, in order of appearance

Page, Ruth. *Stories and Social Media*.

I used Page's critical text as another reference off of which I based my opinions and theories about networkism. Page delves into the cognitive implications and consequences of social media use as well as the positive outcomes which may arise from the influx of narratives that are truly occurring every second.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

Jameson is universally regarded as one of the fundamental texts describing the postmodern period. While I wanted to divorce "networkism" from postmodernism, I used Jameson's framework as a point of intersection and departure in conceptualizing my definition of networkism.

Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*.

This text is a comprehensive overview of narrative and narrative theory. In researching and going further into the nuances of narrative (theory) I relied on this text heavily in situating my arguments among past critical movements.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*.

Levi-Strauss, the father of modern anthropology, engaged with the world in this piece mostly in terms of shapes and geometrics as a way of breaking down society, cultural constructs, language, and hierarchies to expose the foundation of modern knowledge. In this paper, networkism is closely aligned with Levi-Strauss' theory of a world that can be cut up and fragmented (also fragmentation of the self).

Egan, Jennifer. *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.

Great book! Egan's use of "new media" incorporated into a traditional narrative style is disorienting yet familiar.

Brown, Jeffrey. *PBS Newshour: An Interview with Jennifer Egan*.

Brownrigg, Sylvia. *The Metaphysical Touch*. 1998

Critically acclaimed, the majority of this novel is written in e-mail format.

Twitter.com

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*.

I wanted a closer look at the definition of modernism and postmodernism, the precursors to networkism. I also was interested in the idea of pastiche (also referenced in Jameson) to make certain that networkism, while incorporating ideas and perspectives from past literary/cultural movements, is not simply a repurposing of these ancestral influences.

Fanon, Franz. *On Violence*.

This essay is used my final work because I was very taken with Fanon's work on the colonizing v. colonized populations. The applications to present-day are astounding and I was intrigued by how social media is also a form of colonization. My question for Fanon would be, if you are both the colonizer and colonized, how do you gain your independence? Is social media forcing us to be walking contradictions and is the only way out to *not* use these platforms?

Bhabha, Homi K. *Of Mimicry and Man*.

Homi Bhabha is another perspective that I enjoyed learning about and was able to do some independent research on. In an antecedent to a lecture she gave at Stanford, he wrote, "(Mimicry) is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled" which I thought was significant to networkism; even though we are attempting to divide our world up into a series of networks to connect with people on mutual levels, we are also trying to assert our own individualism – thus the dilemma of character and persona.

Ciccoricco, David. *Reading Network Fiction*.

David Ciccoricco's text on network fiction is one of the best representations of new work that is being done in an attempt to narratively analyze works that are being created and posted in cyberspace (to use Chun's term). I was particularly interested in his discussion on the changes in societal consciousness with the advent of media and the internet and attempted to incorporate some of his arguments among mine.

Joyce, Michael. *Afternoon*.

This text is completely online and is fascinating in its engagement with reader control. The reader has the power to move backwards and forwards, to skip over certain parts or to re-route the narrative with the click of a mouse. *Afternoon* is one of the first hypertexts and one that is discussed extensively in Ciccoricco's text. I used it for the purposes of background research and to get an idea of what has previously been considered an example of "network fiction."



YOLO  
*A novel*

By, Meaghan Novi

## Chapter 1 - Mrs. Bloome

Mrs. Bloome opened her eyes unwillingly. It wasn't so much the noise of her husband's iPhone alarm (Sting's *Fields of Gold*) that annoyed her, it was the time. Five thirty a.m. is an hour belonging to the very young or the very old, not the middle aged. The man sleeping soundly beside her, her husband Dr. Bloome, slept on undisturbed by the guitar solo. True, his collegiate years of listening to Petty, Morrison, Hendrix, and Clapton had caused him premature hearing loss (how could anyone blame him?) but it was no excuse for denying his wife of nearly three decades her rest.

Mrs. Bloome awoke to a headache, reminiscent of a late and boisterous houseguest: pounding. Ever the gracious and practiced hostess, she accepted such tardiness and moved on; she had to; she was hungover. (Mrs. Bloome's tolerance, high for alcohol, was less so for sleep deprivation.) Mrs. Bloome reached for her phone, a Blackberry, but stopped. The room had become blessedly silent again.

And so, a return to sleep that was granted by the outstretching of a firm hand, a surgeon's hand. Dr. Bloome athletically hit the snooze button on his iPhone. It was an act of extension – an extra five minutes of rest – and equally, of prevention – neither were yet ready to meet the day.

Mrs. Bloome thinking of the night before, remembered the stiff peaks of that decadent chocolate meringue – it had held up marvelously in front of the critics. Its integrity had been deliciously preserved by proper technique, soul and patience no.

The mental consequences were usual for Fridays following a Thursday night of dry white wine and left over mussels in vodka sauce. The sweet and bitter taste of the Sauvignon blanc would have suited for a Romeo or another foolish lover like Mrs. Bloome. The salty of the seaside aroma, compliments of the fresh mussels, paired well with the tart ripeness of the tomatoes. They had simmered for eleven hours in a hot spring of vodka, onions, garlic and olive oil then finished with cream, salt, pepper, and parmigiano reggiano – a gastronomical chorus of honest Italian harmonies. The heirloom tomatoes of the brightest colors had all been expressly ordered from Sicily earlier that day, in time for the evening's gamut of foodies. Her inspiration was of course that island of perpetual summer and heat and passion. It was an appropriate juxtaposition for the wintry northeastern weather. Everyone said the restaurant's atmosphere had been enchanting, almost bewitching, and certainly inviting. Mrs. Bloome, no stranger to casting spells, had placed tea lights in white paper lanterns and hung them to create the illusion of a warmer eve, one that had escaped the blue clutches of the northeastern frost. The lamps heating the outdoor seating space had been adorned in cream crepe shawls and fresh flower garlands, sent over from a friend. It had been a marvelous evening. Mrs. Bloome sighed happily both in memory and at the joy of again being asleep.

After an unexceptional three minutes, unable to fall back asleep, Mrs. Bloome could wait no longer.

“Graham” Mrs. Bloome said, looking over at her husband who was still sleeping. “Graham, *mi amor*,” she gave his right shoulder a gentle push, “can I please borrow your phone?”

“What's that?..” he mumbled, turning onto his stomach, his voice lost in his overstuffed pillow. His right hand reached for his iPhone, he tipped it up and set it back down on the nightstand with the soft clack of plastic on wood.

“Graham,” she whispered, “can I have your phone real quick?”

“Mmmm...what time is it?”

“Um, 5:33, *oggi per favore!*” She urged. Her Blackberry's wireless internet was not nearly as fast as that of the iPhone 4S and Mrs. Bloome, endowed with as much patience and perhaps a little more than the next woman, could not stand any longer for the dinosaur internet speed of her own cell, not today.

Dr. Bloome unplugged it from the charger without lifting his head from his pillow and reaching back, handed his wife the phone. Mrs. Bloome, now fully awake, clutched the phone and looked at it greedily. Her brown hair cascaded down her shoulders in messy curls, enveloping her as she bent down over the iPhone to search for the NYTimes app she had requested her husband install; he never used it but he always enjoyed watching Mrs. Bloome read and reread restaurant reviews tirelessly, attempting to prepare for her own opening. And now the moment had finally come for her to be noticed.



“Goddammit” Mrs. Bloome swore, the words feeling daring on her tongue. In order for her to get a solid wireless connection, the desktop computer which was hooked up to the wireless router was nestled down two flights of stairs and through the dining room and needed to be turned on. The trip – less than three minutes – would cost Mrs. Bloome not only time, but her pretense of remaining in bed, warm, cozy and at ease, for another thirty, well twenty-seven, minutes.

Mrs. Bloome wrestled with herself for what seemed like too long. The translucent, blue-gray notification box kept popping up on the screen of the iPhone, reminding her that only a flip of a

switch now prevented her from knowing, and knowing immediately, the fate of her restaurant and her future.

The suspense was overpowering and with the agility of her younger self, Mrs. Bloome darted out of bed, down the flights of stairs, around the corner and through the dining room. Silently, so as not to awaken her son Silas, she completed the mission deftly. Once down to the computer room, Rosemary pulled the power strip out with her foot from underneath the desk – no sense in bending over – pushed the button with her big toe and retraced her steps, scampering back up to the master bedroom.

She leapt into bed, inadvertently jumping on top of her husband. “Graham! I can't wait to read this!”

“Read what babe?”

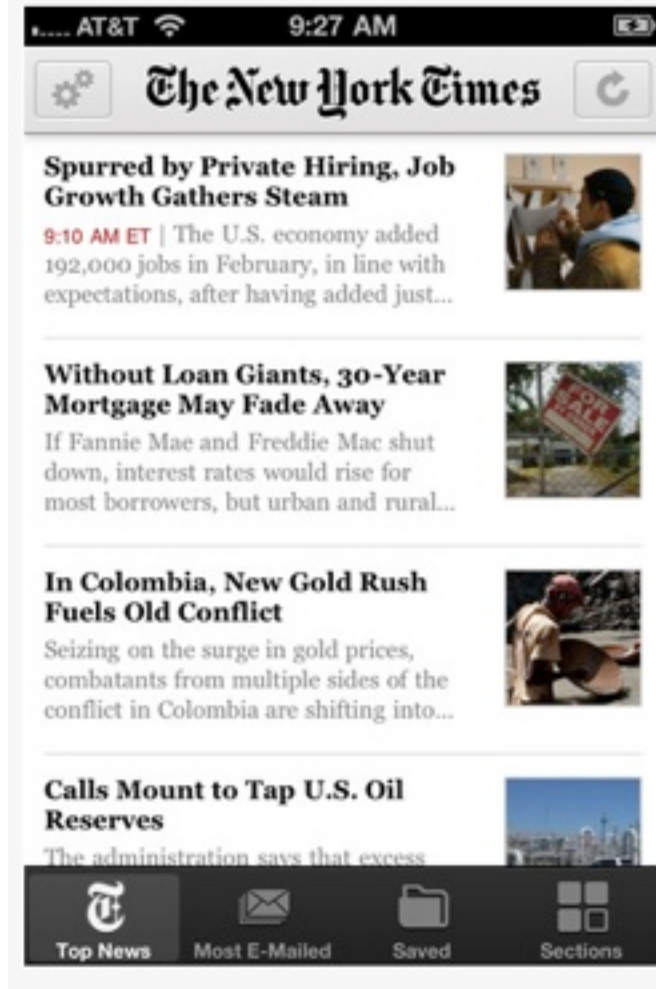
“The review from last night!”

“Oh...” he struggled awake, “oh...god, of course!”

“It's alright you can, go back to sleep. Let me just open this app now...” her fingertips unlocked the iPhone's screen pressing 1,9,8,4 – the year they were married – then sliding across the sea of downloaded iPhone apps – some always in use, some lost to the myriad of selection.

“It's going to be fine Rosemary, you knocked it out of the park last night.”

“Thanks...okay moment of truth here we go...”



“Woo okay, okay...” Mrs. Bloome signed, narrating her every step. “Not Top News.. Here it is – New York Times Restaurant Review – from... yesterday...night...Pete Wells, jackass, I'm just kidding, I didn't mean it Pete” she paused and looked up at the ceiling, crossing herself and kissing her index finger and thumb as she whispered an amen. “Pete Wells, that’s ma boy...come on buddy...let’s have a good review!”

Mrs. Bloome hesitated, her finger over top of the article, “Avelino+Bloome in New York.”

Finally, she clicked and opened to “A Mid(winter) Night’s Dream” next to which, there were 4 stars. Mrs. Bloome breathed a sigh of intense relief and joy and began to read, “I always knew I liked him,” she said.



“Good?”

“Very good.” Mrs. Bloome smiled, “want to hear some of it?”

“Do I? Please indulge, but first,” Dr. Bloome sat up from his pillow and kissed his wife full on the lips, “congratulations Rosemary, I love you and I am so proud of you, now. Go on.”

She began to read aloud.

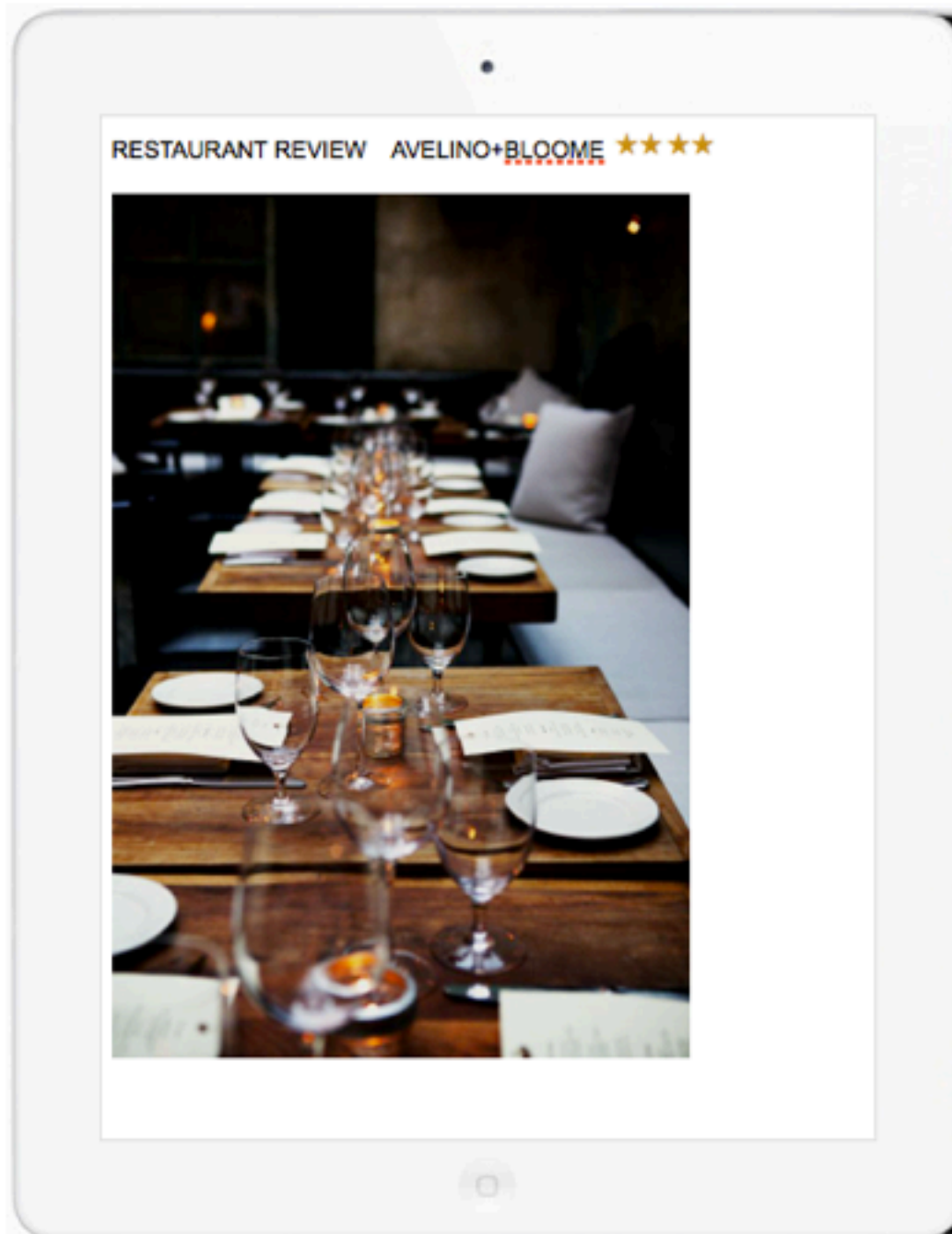
“...I AM BACK in Mrs.McPherson's eleventh grade English class and today's lesson is on Shakespeare. Insert collective groan here. But not only will we be learning about the life and times of he-who-made-Cliff's-Notes-a-necessity, no, we will be reading one of his plays. And to top it all off it's about, get this, fairies...”

She knitted her eyebrows.

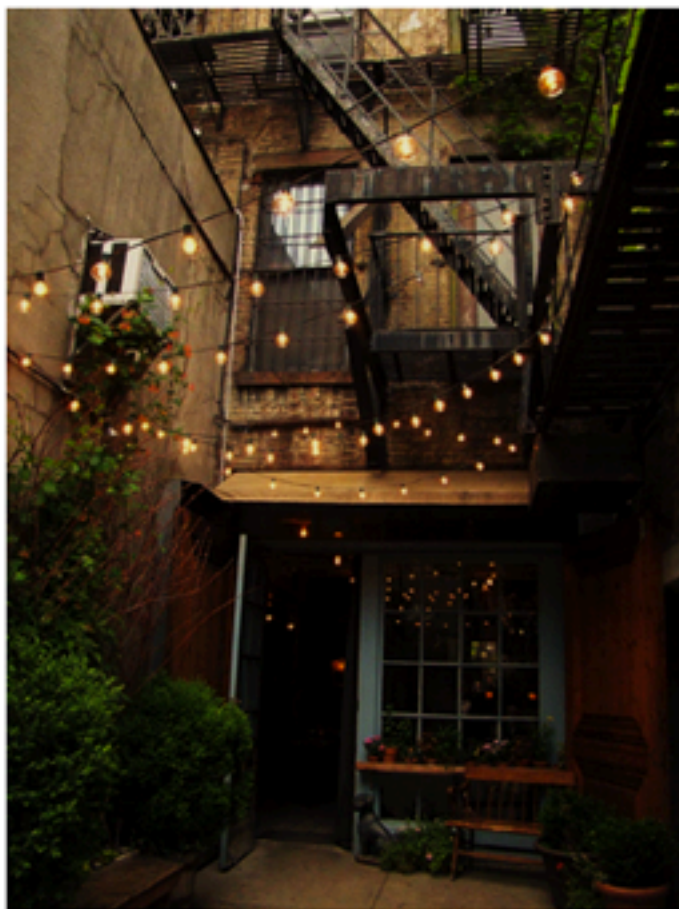
“What’s wrong, darling?” Dr. Bloome asked, “It was going so well!”

“I can barely read this little type..hand me the iPad please?”

“With pleasure.” He reached behind his head to the nightstand for the iPad.



RESTAURANT REVIEW AVELINO+BLOOME ★★★



Photos Courtesy of Renee Lapone



RESTAURANT REVIEW AVELINO+BLOOME ★★★

## A Mid(winter) Night's Dream

Avelino+Bloome in New York

By [PETE WELLS](#)

Published: December 21, 2012

I AM BACK in Mrs. McPherson's eleventh grade English class and today's lesson is on Shakespeare. Insert collective groan here. But not only will we be learning about the life and times of he-who-made-Cliff's-Notes-a-necessity, no, we will be reading one of his plays. And to top it all off it's about fairies. So basically, this class just hit an all time low. There is no such thing as magic. I repeat, just so we're clear on this— there is no such thing as magic.

To my former teenage, and much cooler self, I make this appeal: please forgive the soft-hearted middle-aged romantic, lover of all things *au bon gout* that you've become. Because after a meal at Rosemary Avelino's (you may have heard of her, she's the chef of *Melanzana NYC*) newest culinary bite, Avelino +Bloome, I am quite certain I may be, literally and figuratively, eating the words of my salty youth.

RESTAURANT REVIEW AVELINO+BLOOME ★★☆☆

In true Avelino style, the directions to the restaurant are challengingly Taoist - "How to get here: By Looking for us, you may not Find us." The address on the website is little more than a hint: "we are located somewhere on Elizabeth," even the local reviewers on Yelp.com and those contributors to the Zagat guide haven't revealed the exact location of the establishment's whereabouts.

Like the lovers Lysander and Hermia, I made my way, feeling, through the "forest" of Elizabeth St. My Googlemaps app rendered useless, I relied instead on the senses. Soon enough the sounds of lively conversation and chiming wine glasses, the smells of roasting tomatoes, freshly baking bread, and olive oil and the sight of a façade decorated with strung lights and paper lanterns assured me I had arrived at the right place.

As soon as I was guided to a table on the outdoor patio, which was, to my great delight, kept comfortably warm by several gas lamps and the general positive externality of amiable human interaction, I found in front of me a worn, oak cutting board on top of which rested a personal,

RESTAURANT REVIEW AVELINO+BLOOME ★★☆☆

but by no means small, loaf of hot rosemary sourdough bread. Accompanying this delectable starter, was a dipping plate with a mash of fresh and dried herbs over which my server expertly poured the right amount of extra virgin olive oil. The oil itself was so pure, with sweet floral overtones grounded in a tart, crisp base flavor - I had to ask its origin. To form, Ms. Avelino spares no expense when choosing quality and the oil comes straight from her family's vineyards in Ungary, Italy. Shipped in weekly, you can be sure it's the best you'll get short of traveling to Italy, picking the olives yourself and watching them being pressed.

(But I warn you, the oil is not for sale - I asked. The Avelino's vineyards produce their oil for personal use, mainly as gifts; some people bring wine, the Avelino's bring olive oil. Collective sigh.)

So if we could all exude Ms. Avelino's class, as she does so effortlessly, we wouldn't need to compensate by ordering a swath of appetizers (sweet: blackberry fennel pizza, grilled scallops with apricot caviar, bruleéd fig and goat cheese

RESTAURANT REVIEW AVELINO+BLOOME ★★★★★

crostini; savory: bruschetta with sage pesto and fresh buffalo mozzarella, a trio of handcrafted ravioli – sweet potato and ricotta, eggplant and fontina, parsnip, anise and pecorino romano – in a white truffle glaze) and a carafe of the house white.

Had I not already been convinced of Ms. Avelino's artistic talent, after the parade of dishes that graced my table not even Puck's love-in-idleness could have persuaded me otherwise. The primo course sated my gourmand appetite and solidified my high opinion of her creativity and mastery of the culinary craft.

Following two more bottles of white, I ordered a third – red (equally as crisp, a deeper, meatier flavor perfect for the entree course). My server being of good humor – a rare treat in downtown – allowed me to request almost every dish throughout the evening. His suggestions, impeccable both of food and drink, paralleled his attentive and concerned service. He was as observant as a Demetrius to his Helena, Shakespeare's girl-next-door.

RESTAURANT REVIEW AVELINO+BLOOME ★★☆☆

Now the entrée course. A new definition for the divine may be at hand: homemade gnocchi in butternut squash mascarpone sauce topped with a sweet tapenade of toasted pine nuts, walnuts and hazelnuts in brown sugar and cinnamon. The trumpets of ambrosial revelry sounded in Annunciation of this heavenly autochthonic union of squash puree, potato pasta and nutty accent. It is, quite simply, a must-have.

Next in tow was the seared lemon swordfish paired with mushroom parmesan risotto and crisped asparagus. This was the only dish of the night with which I found fault, and it being minor merit, I make note of it because a critic's article becomes stale if everything is perfect. With this in mind, I indulge, the dish could have been better. The swordfish was overdone and the asparagus seemed thrown on the plate as an afterthought. It was a shame, the continuity of the dish seemed interrupted.

For the next few entrees no words currently exist in my broad, but mortal, vocabulary which describe them accurately.



RESTAURANT REVIEW AVELINO+BLOOME ★★☆☆

I ordered a side of the half-baked ziti in meat sauce, a side of Sorrentine Ratatouille that tasted like sunshine, a classically prepared chicken parmesan on a bed of sautéed spinach and baby arugula in olive oil, garlic and lemon and roasted rosemary and thyme potatoes salted to perfection.

And we are not even to the dessert. Although I had already consumed enough to feed a family of five for weeks, I knew I was not yet finished. I tried to hold back but unfortunately, as my favorite gelato flavor is pistachio and as Ms. Avelino is of the similar persuasion, I simply had to have her pistachio and chocolate gelato in a limoncello-cream with a sprinkle of amaretto cookie crumbs. My server, with whom at this point in the evening I was on a first name basis, Adriaen also brought me a mini cannoli, a petit new york style cheesecake, a piece of nostalgic, lovely tiramisu and to finish, espresso and sesame anise biscotti. I could go on, but suffice it to say that at this moment I truly believed I was in a Shakespearean forest and my Fate was being directed by King Oberon and Queen Titania.

RESTAURANT REVIEW AVELINO+BLOOME ★★★★★

Adriaen convinced me I could not leave without trying the grappa. I could not refuse a drink on the house, but had to admit to him I had never tried grappa before. (Gasp.) It was a cultural experience. Grappa is much more about the aroma of the alcohol than the actual taste, it comes in a shot glass but you do not, I repeat do not, drink it like one. You sip it, little by little as the meal you just ate settles, or rather in my case stacks like Roman stones in your stomach. The process was extremely relaxing, like a massage, and I left Avelino+Bloome in a certain reverie I very much wish to repeat again and again.

Ms. Avelino's achievement is quite simply a masterful experiment in authentic, artistic, expressive and deeply honest cooking. And I heartily give my recommendation and four star rating to one most deserving of it.

Mrs. Bloome smiled.

“Babe!” Dr. Bloome said, “Babe, you are so good! So good, I am so proud of you!”

“Thanks. All for you, you know?”

“Ah, nonsense.”

Mrs. Bloome looked closer at the iPad in her hand and made a face. “What? How do I email this to myself?” She looked to her husband, “Graham? Help me? *Per favore.*”

Dr. Bloome felt a surge of adrenaline through his body. His sphincter muscles quivered. And it occurred to him just then that watching his wife – so confident, sexy, frowning at the technology that was frustrating her – was a definite turn on; he felt teased by the way her cheeks became flushed, the way the vein above her left eye twitched, the way her normally subdued Italian accent asserted itself unapologetically. “What is it?” Dr. Bloome finally managed to ask, in his best attempt to sound concerned.

He was aroused and yet, work called. Dr. Bloome got up and went into the bathroom. “I’m so proud of you Rosemary!” he repeated.

After a few minutes, Dr. Bloome turned off his electric razor and the bedroom went completely silent. The soft heat coming up out of the vent caused a panel curtain to bloom and swell in graceful waves of dulce de leche colored voile. As he turned on the faucet to brush his teeth, Mrs. Bloome could picture him in her mind standing at the sink looking into the mirror preparing himself for another stressful day in the O-R.

His toothbrush, also electric, had a timer which beeped every thirty seconds to notify him when it was time to switch sides. Left to Right, then top to bottom. The whole brushing process lasted exactly two minutes. Mrs. Bloome had never understood why someone would need a timer (much less two minutes) to brush his teeth, but she was so used to it by now that she laid back onto her pillow and tried to predict when the thirty second beeps would come.

With the last thirty pending, Mrs. Bloome got up and walked into the bathroom to start her own day. Dr. Bloome, his mouth overflowing with toothpaste foam (an unintended by-product of the superior electric bristles' rotating power) tried to smile as she came in. Mrs. Bloome laughed out loud, “you look like you have rabies Graham,” she teased.

Dr. Bloome bobbed his head from side to side attempting sass in helpless silence. If he spoke now, his diligent two minute routine would be interrupted and he would have to repeat the process. To be sure, as he always said, that every tooth was as clean as it could be. “We have the power to be clean, why not take advantage of it?” he often argued.

“Well,” Mrs. Bloome's mother had told her upon hearing of her future son-in-law's eccentricity, “there could be worse things.”

“Yes mother,” Mrs. Bloome forced herself to acknowledge. Even now, even though her mother was right, Mrs. Bloome behaved like any daughter - avoiding crediting her mother's correctness at all costs.



In the bathroom, looking at herself in the wall-length mirror, Mrs. Bloome could see the beginning lines of crow's feet at the corners of her eyes. Leaning over the cream granite sink, closer to the mirror's surface, she pulled the suspect skin folds taught, then released. "Awesome," Mrs. Bloome said turning the hot water knob as a flow of self-deprecating thoughts spilled into the basin along with the tap. Not only were all affordable reflective bathroom fixtures made to exacerbate the effect of sleep deprivation on under eye circles, but, as Mrs. Bloome's theory concluded, the objects in home décor mirrors really were closer and larger than they appeared. Why didn't they, too, come with warning labels?

Glancing enviously at her husband's still-trim figure, Mrs. Bloome stepped into the shower, conscious of her "matronly" figure, and concentrated on getting through the next twelve hours smoothly. Two parties of twelve at 3 were in the books for a late lunch, most likely staying until happy hour, a full restaurant for dinner with the expectation that long waits post-review might back-up the kitchen. Mrs. Bloome had her own holiday fête that evening if she could get out, and all of this was dependent upon her arriving early with enough groceries to start prepping for lunch. Somewhere in there she had children to pick up at Newark Airport.

"Might have to make that Penn Station," she thought to herself, massaging her head with shampoo. "The kids can make it there at least..."

Dr. Bloome had been out of the bathroom for several minutes when his wife emerged from the shower in her robe, her hair twisted up like a Middle Eastern beehive. "My god," he said while tightening his tie in place, "you just become more and more beautiful every day. I don't know how you do it." He smirked.

Mrs. Bloome raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips coyly. "How much time do we have?" she asked, silencing her Blackberry.

Dr. Bloome pressed the center button on his iPhone, darkening the screen, "nine minutes?"

"Is that a challenge?"

## Chapter 2 - Kate

It's drizzling and cold and Katherine Bloome has been awake for a time. It isn't early where she is – just grey, as usual. And foggy, yet again. #Britishissues Long before Katherine feels her cell phone vibrate, she is up and has made a pot of tea. She knows the messages are all from her father, though she hasn't looked at her phone as she's been busy burning two pieces of toast and given up the breakfast attempt in lieu of a day-old croissant with Nutella. But the texts are irritating, causing the red light in the upper right hand corner of Katherine's cell phone to blink angrily like an aggravated zit. It reminds her of middle school and hastily she shakes the painful memory: an oversimplified world in which "terrorists" are played by young males wielding Axe bombs and the greatest "threat to national security" is a population with uncontrolled hormones.

Dr. Bloome knows his daughter is awake; she has been for a while. Sleep for the father-daughter duo is an afterthought – for the former, the attitude is a product of the medical system pre- the proposed 40 hr work week and for the other, the habit of not sleeping was acquired while trying to copy a hero. Dr. Bloome's alarm is always set for 5:30 am, as is Katherine's. She is standing looking blankly into her computer screen, tilted at an angle. Holding the jar of orange marmalade and sipping her tea, she thinks about how her father must suspect his unanswered text messages are simply being ignored. Not one to be neglectful, she opens them.

<text from Dad> 11:19 am

Good morning sweetpea! I know you're probably packing. Can't wait to see you tonight – I love you.

<text from Dad> 11:19 am

You're mother is making

<text from Kate> 11:22 am

??

<text from Dad> 11:22 am

All of (Y)OUR favorites!

Sometimes Katherine can't bring herself to talk to the people she cares about the most, even if it's just through a text message. She leans her forehead on the cool kitchen counter and exhales slowly. This is something she's working on - trying to be better at communication.

Katherine picks up her phone, a Blackberry, and holds it with two hands. Her fingers are poised over the flat, smooth screen that shows an image of someone's, everyone's, digital keyboard.

She taps the screen with her fingertips.

<text from Dad> 11:36 am

Kate? Is everything ok? Are you working? Can u call? I love you.

<text from Kate> 12:01 pm  
Hi Dad! I was eating and had my phone on silent!

<text from Kate> 12:06 pm  
Should I call now? I loveyou too

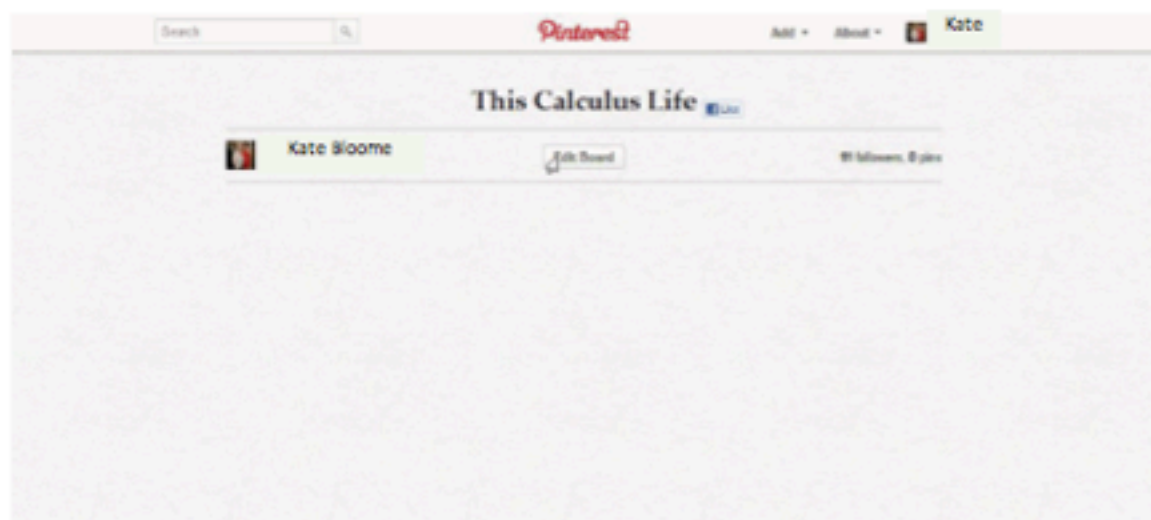
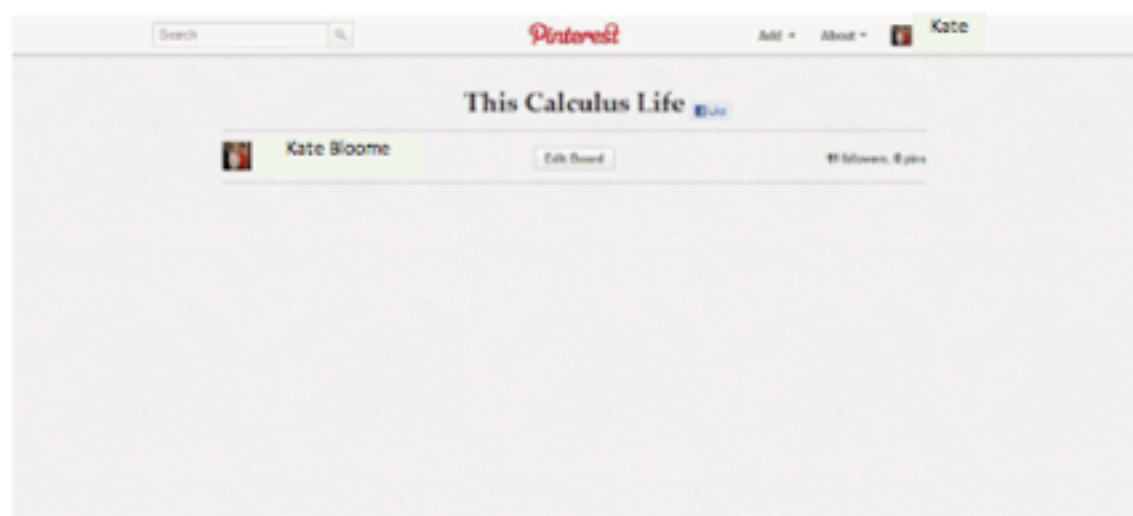
Katherine is feeling absurdly lethargic from the amount of caffeine she's already consumed this morning - four cups of coffee, now pots of Earl Grey in the Dean & DeLuca mug her parents brought over for her as a housewarming gift a few months ago when they came to visit. The mug, more than the visit, was an olive branch from her mother – an apology for the begrudging, disdainful attitude with which a mother views her child's life choices. For Katherine, the exact meaning of the overpriced home good was a frequent topic of conversation before her friends warned her of developing paranoia. She often wonders if she doesn't sometimes project her own misgivings onto others, assuming things that just simply aren't true, to preoccupy her mind.

She plays with the idea that any interpretation is inherently wrong and that observation is the only medium of subjectivity. But it's just a thought, fleeting as beauty.

Katherine remembers how she grumbled like a spoiled child, albeit at 23, at the coffee mug's \$28 price tag; it equated to 14 skinny mochas at Starbucks or 28 more days someone in India could survive. But after a disapproving look from her father, she let the matter drop. “Be nice to your mother, Kate” her father hissed, his lips used to the phrase.

Her phone buzzes obnoxiously on the kitchen table; she jumps. In the middle of writing her doctoral thesis on string calculus, she's lately been jittery. To calm her nerves, she has taken to spending copious amounts of time on Pinterest.com. She toys with the mathematical principles surrounding her thesis, trying to justify them on a platform created for aesthetic pleasure.





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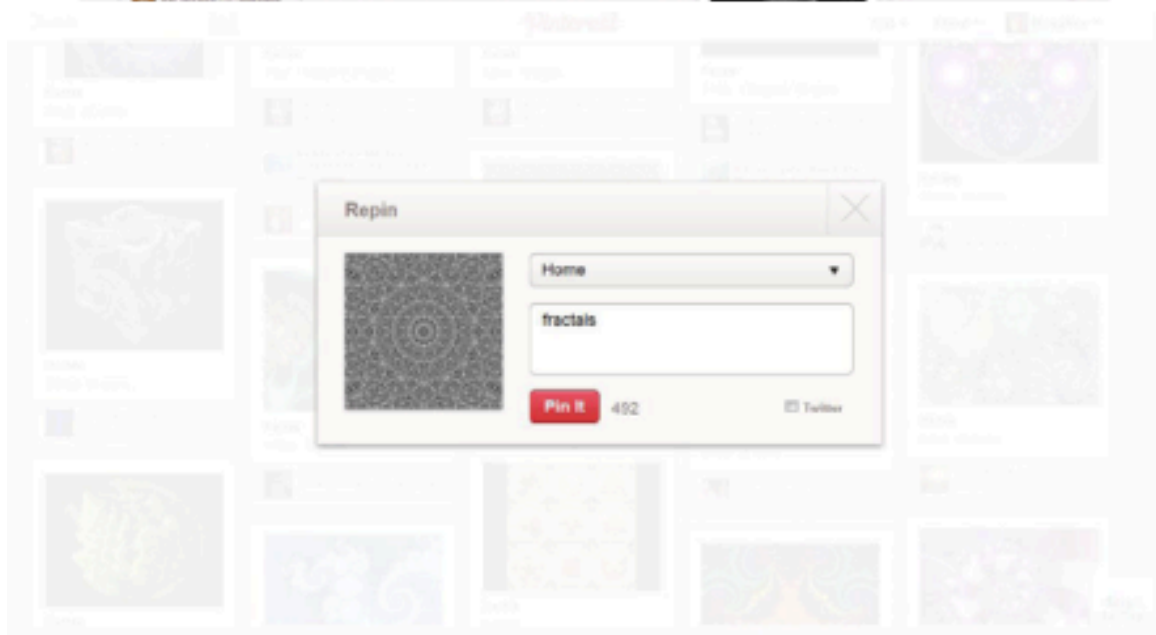
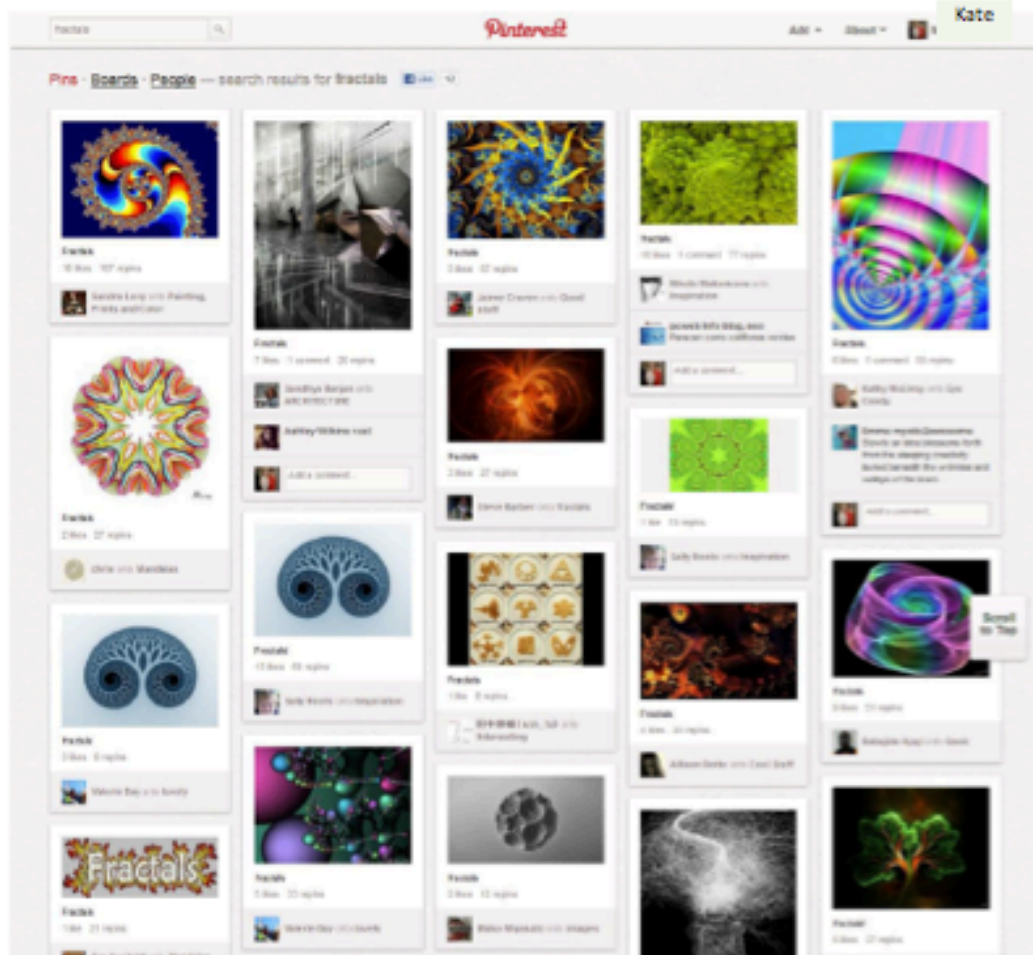
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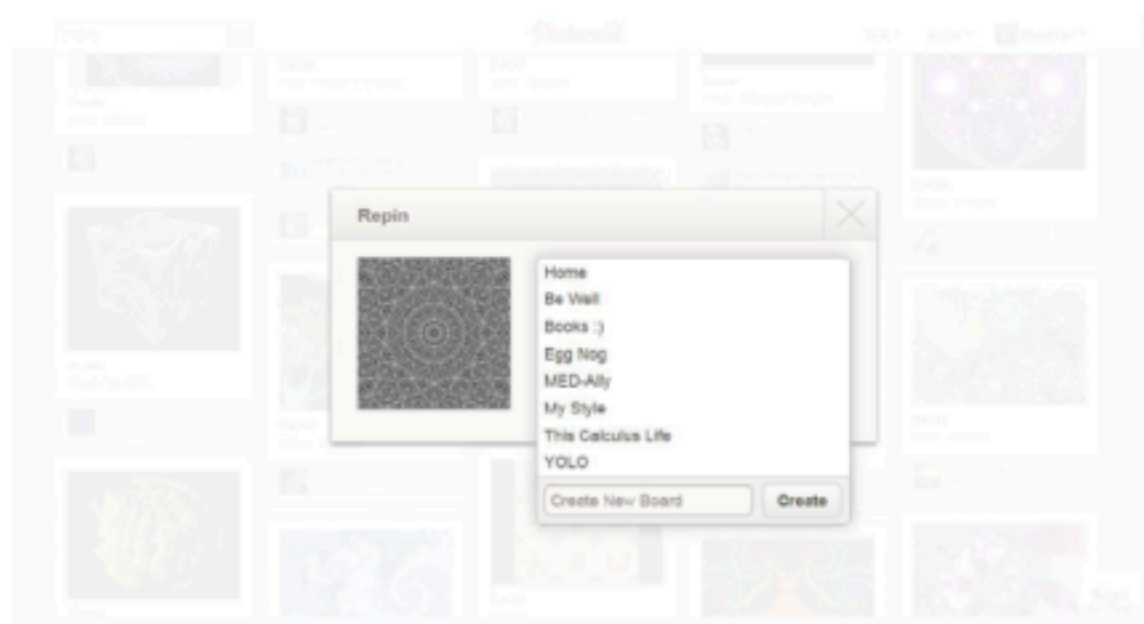
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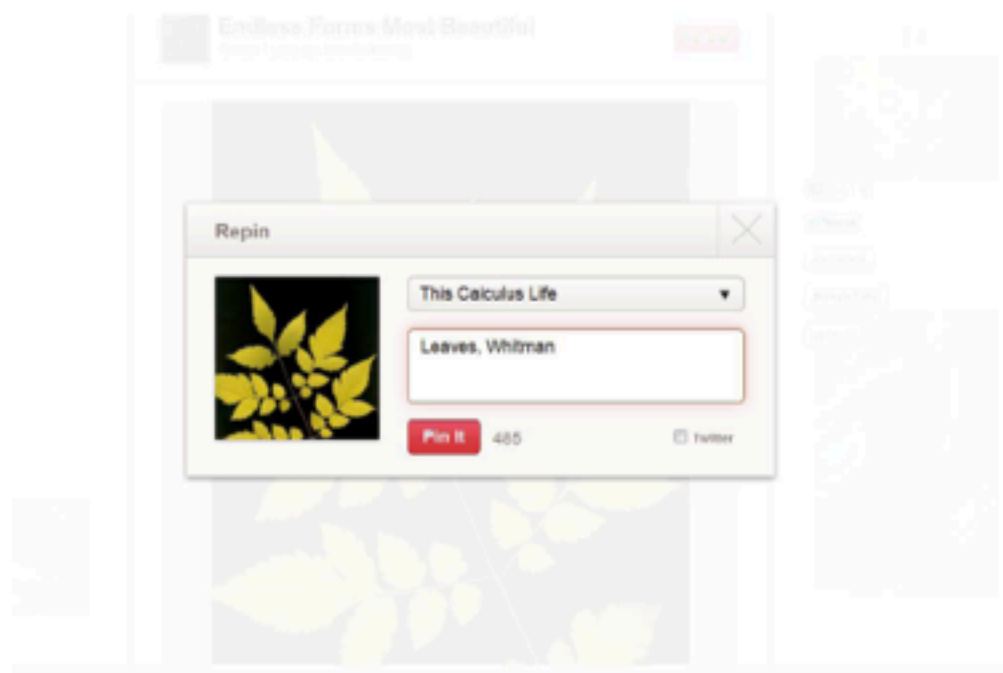
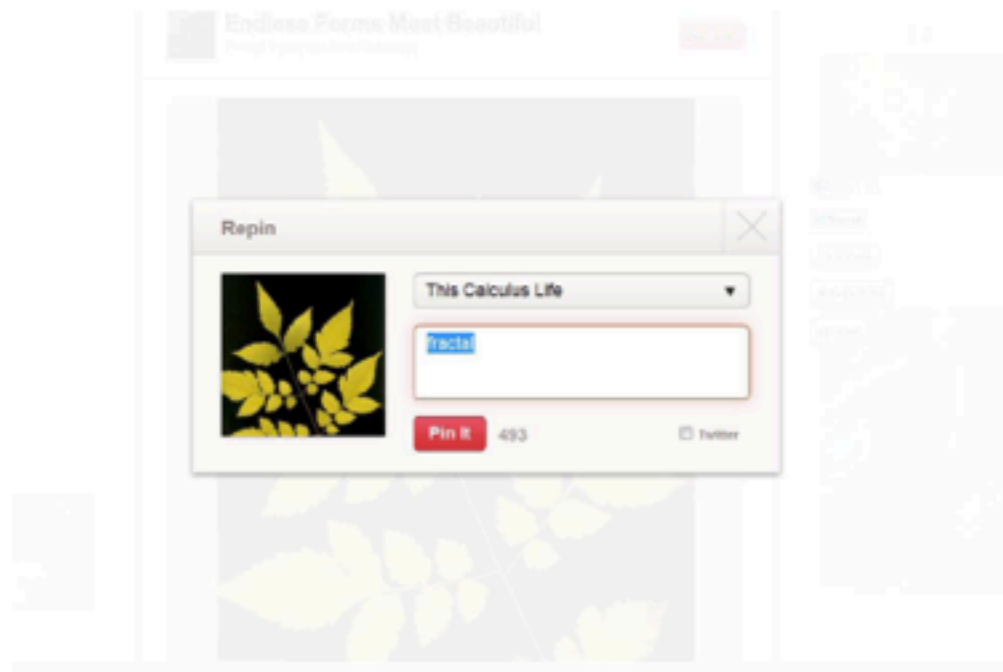


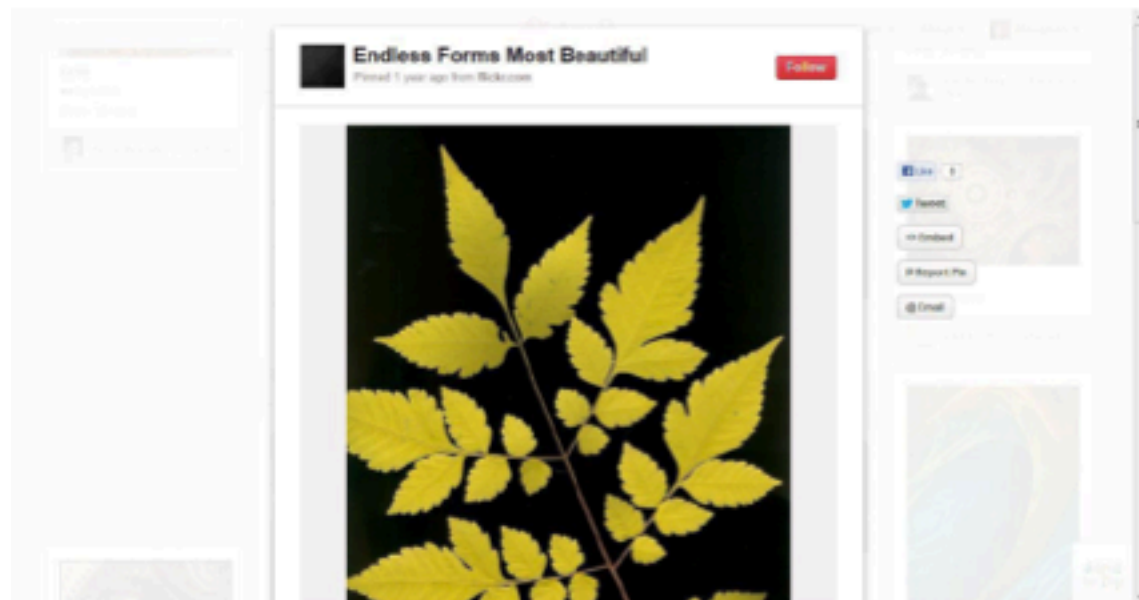
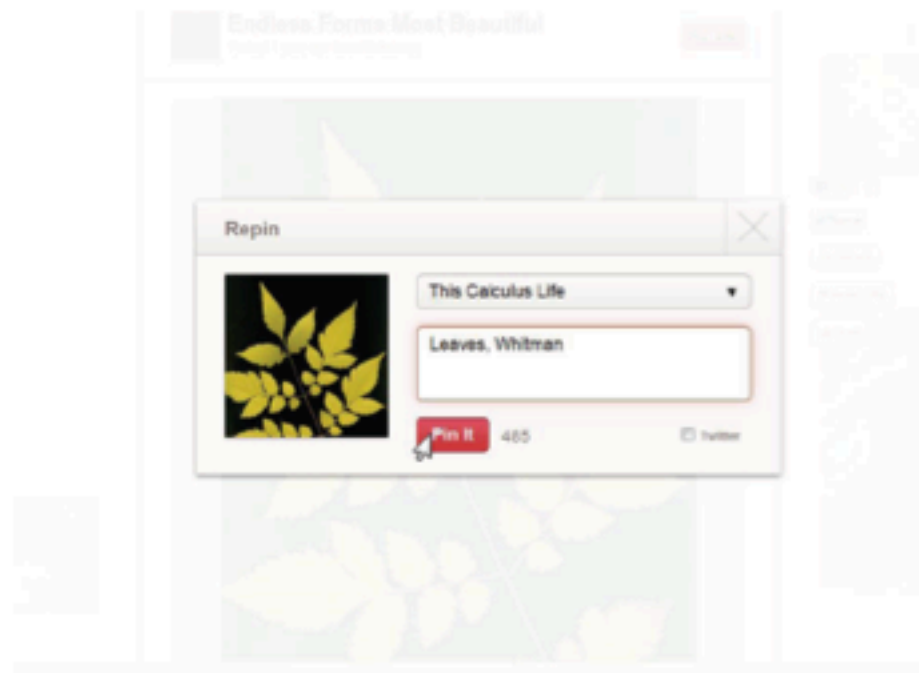


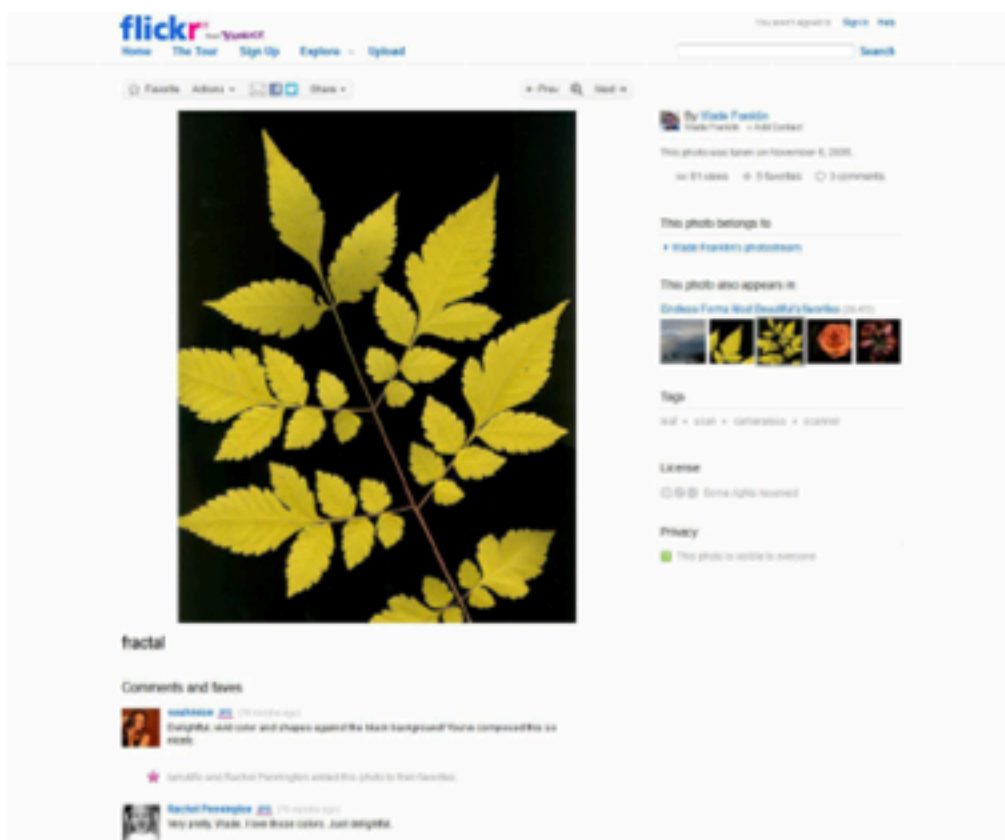
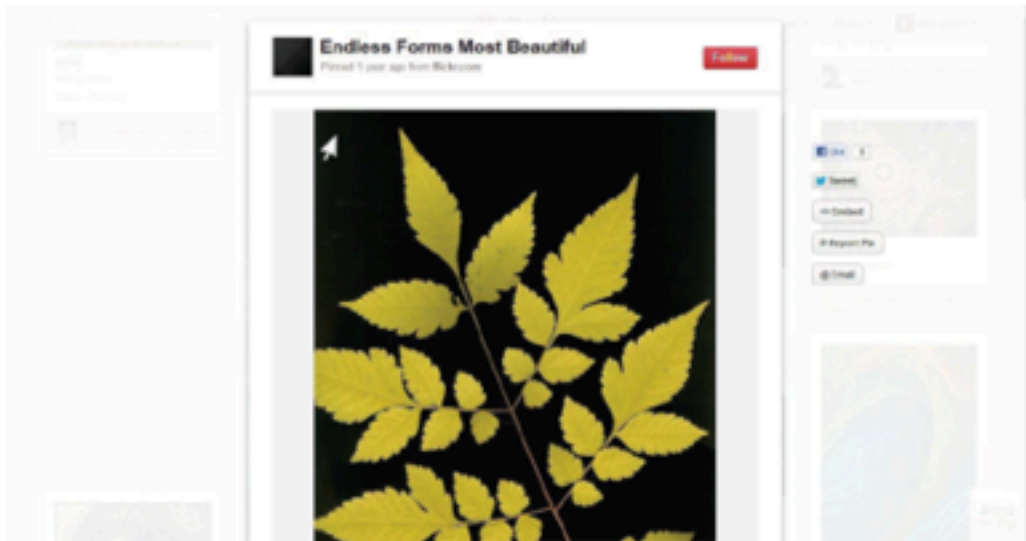












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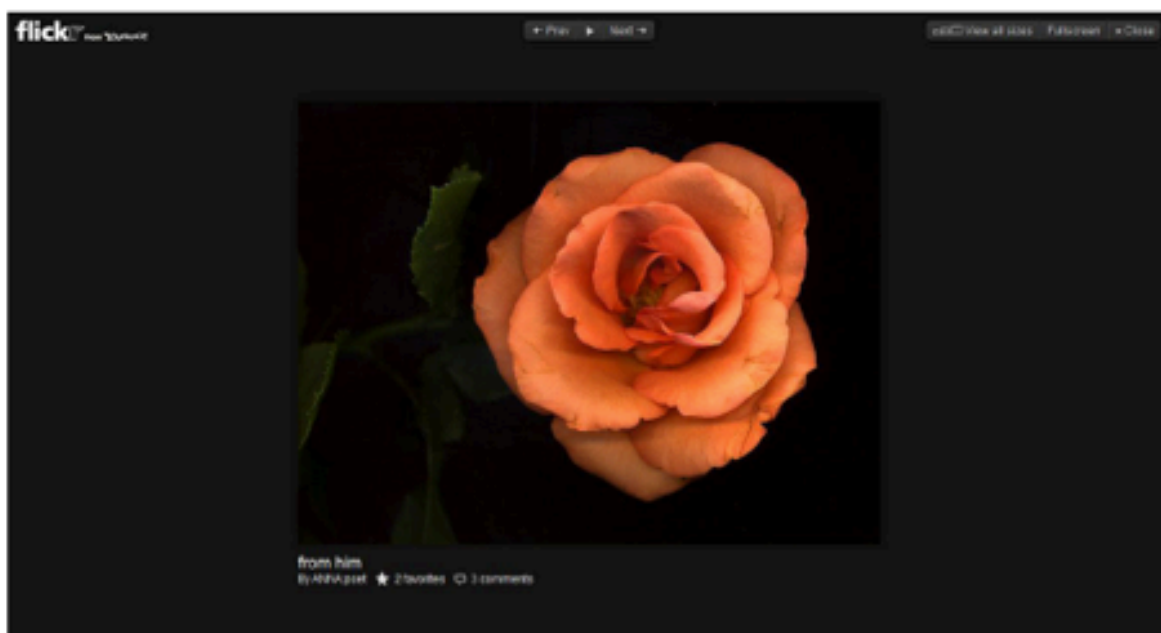
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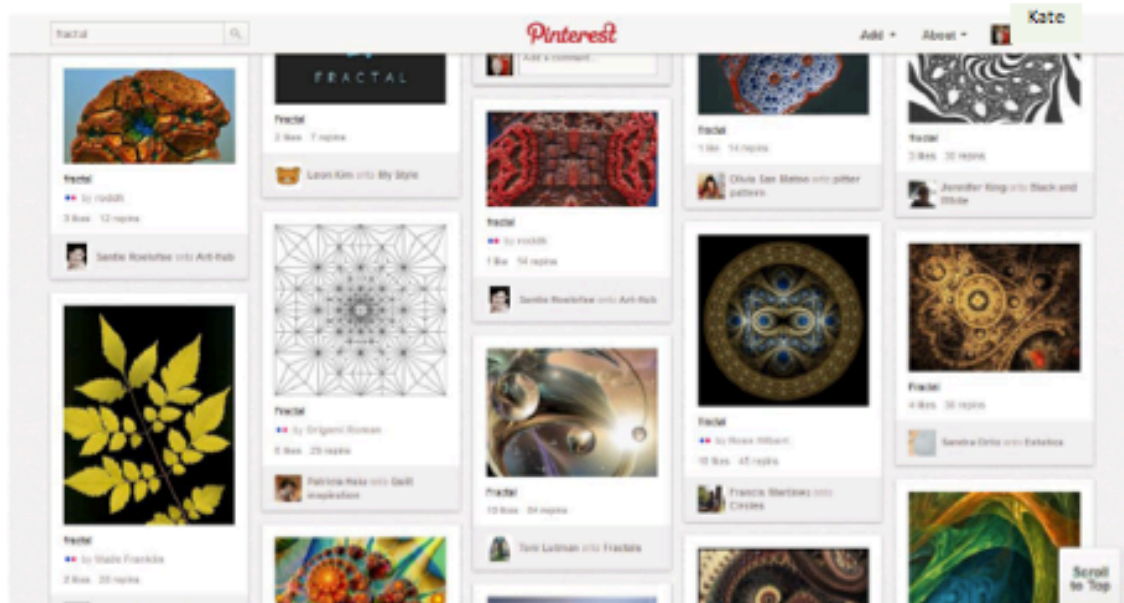
**sarahm** [174 months ago](#)  
 Gorgeous, nice color and shape against the black background! You've composed this so well!

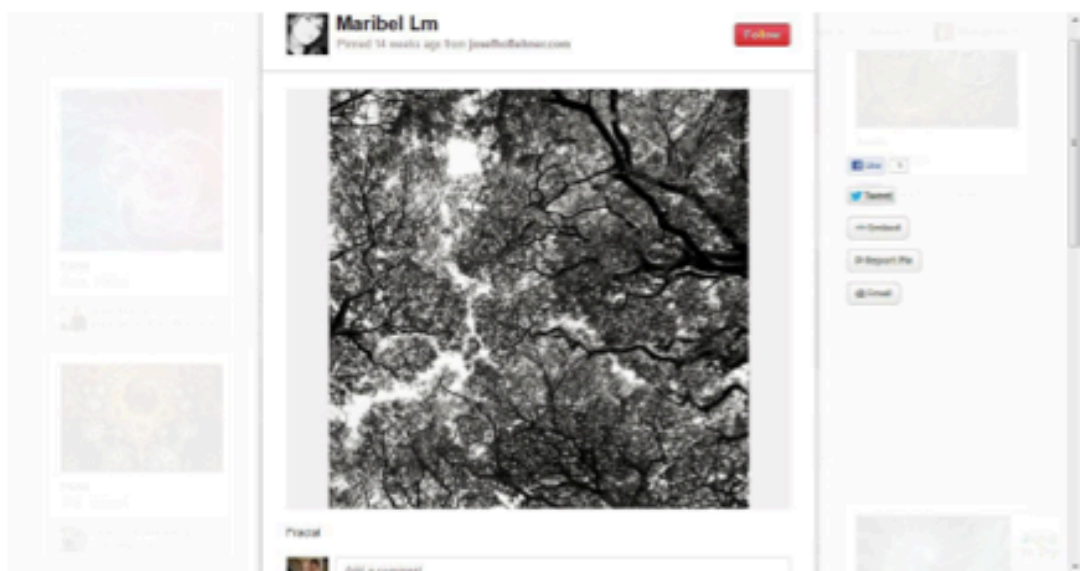
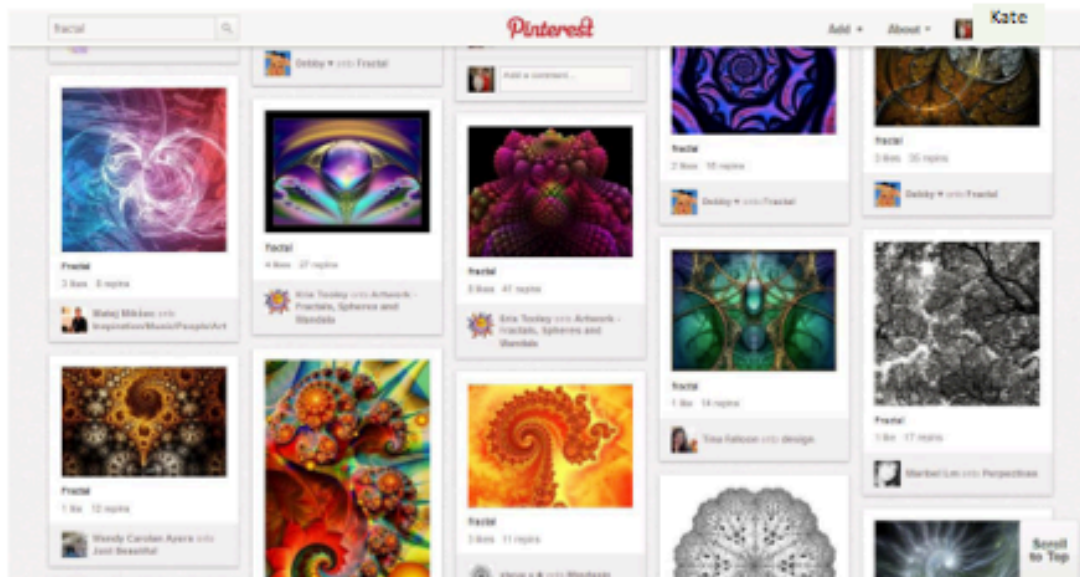
sarahm and Rachel Pennington added this photo to their favorites.

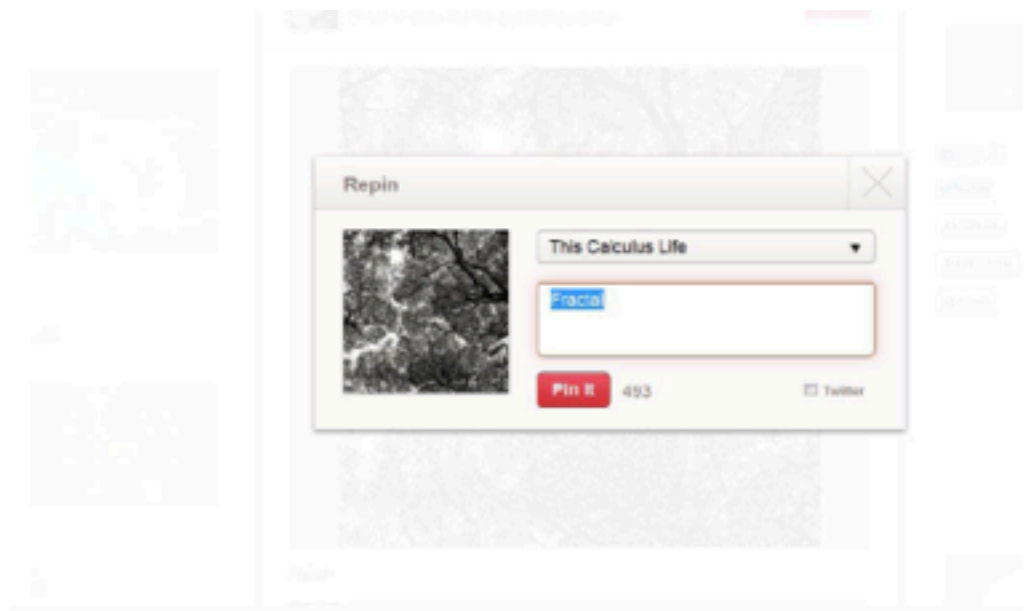
**Rachel Pennington** [174 months ago](#)  
 very pretty, thank you for the color, just gorgeous.

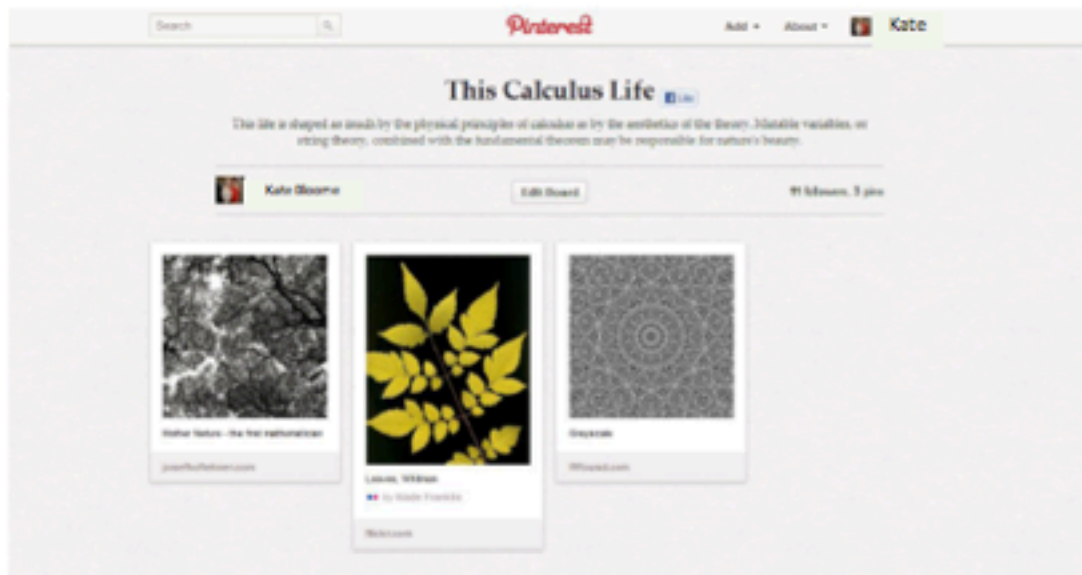












<text from Dad> 12:30 pm

Sorry hon, running late to work. Will be in surgery all day. Talk soon. Love u

And Katherine, absent-minded, isn't really paying attention. Okay fine, she thinks, I'll talk to Dad later, whatever. What she's actually thinking about, tediously analyzing and reanalyzing it, is how much food she's already eaten this morning. She opens up a new tab on Chrome and Google's "calories in orange marmalade." Then "calories in a croissant."

“*Merde*,” she says out loud – to no one, but maybe to her cat – Archimedes. “Eff. My Life,” she declares to the tabby sleeping with one eye open on the sofa bed in the adjacent living space.

She slides her phone away, mildly disgusted at both her conspicuous caloric consumption and the strangeness of texting her father. So early in his morning, late in hers, Katherine hasn’t communicated with anyone, really. She did catch up on email and Facebook (she’s “Now Attending” the “Mayan Apocalypse Party,” an event her brother Freddy invited her to via a direct link.) and she’s forwarded her travel reservations to both her mother and father and put it in the family’s communal Dropbox Folder titled “Til Death Do Us Part.” But in the three minutes that have passed between 6:51 am and 6:54 am Katherine has been focusing on hating herself. For the rest of the day, she’ll be in a mood because she thinks according to her figures she’s eaten over half of her daily needs – bad if she wants to lose weight and retain consciousness. Not to mention the over 50 grams of carbohydrates contained within the soft, flaky and buttery croissant layers – ten times what she had been permitting herself to eat pre-thesis.

It’s also bothersome and slightly unnerving that Katherine has always been off-put by texting her parents, as if it is to some degree taboo. But the feeling extends only to her parents, not to her grandparents, uncles, professors, mentors, or other adult figures that populate her life. She reaches back over for her phone, feeling naked without its smooth edges between her fingers; just in time to receive a text.

<text from Inigo> 12:33 pm

Hey you up? Of course you are. I'm coming over in like fifteen minutes so we can leave for the airport as soon as I get to your casa? Si?

<text from Kate> 12:40 pm

Give me 30?

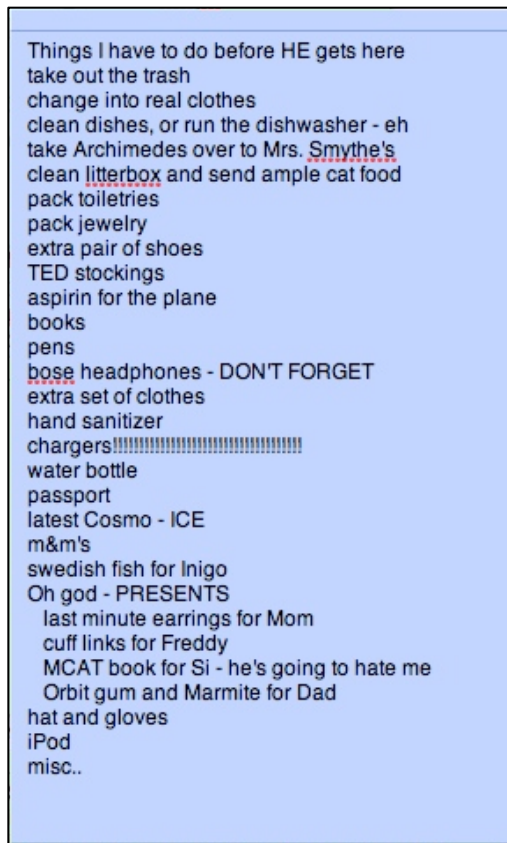
<text from Inigo> 12:41pm

Don't forget Arch - k?

<text from Kate> 12:43 pm

I won't forget my darling cat...

“Oh what?” Katherine looks at the top right corner of her computer screen – 12:43. Then looks back at her phone – 12:44. Her flight home to New York leaves out of London at 3 and the drive is at least an hour, with no traffic. It's a Friday. She thinks they won't be hitting much going southbound. Their flight tickets, Inigo is coming with her, were expensive, it being December 21<sup>st</sup>. But right now, Katherine is thinking about everything she has yet to do – she pulls up “Stickies” on her Macbook.



Things I have to do before HE gets here  
take out the trash  
change into real clothes  
clean dishes, or run the dishwasher - eh  
take Archimedes over to Mrs. Smythe's  
clean litterbox and send ample cat food  
pack toiletries  
pack jewelry  
extra pair of shoes  
TED stockings  
aspirin for the plane  
books  
pens  
bose headphones - DON'T FORGET  
extra set of clothes  
hand sanitizer  
chargers!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
water bottle  
passport  
latest Cosmo - ICE  
m&m's  
swedish fish for Inigo  
Oh god - PRESENTS  
last minute earrings for Mom  
cuff links for Freddy  
MCAT book for Si - he's going to hate me  
Orbit gum and Marmite for Dad  
hat and gloves  
iPod  
misc..

“What is my life.” Katherine stares at her computer screen, looking up at the corner again – 12:52. “Alright, gotta get moving.”

In a flurry of movements, Kate turns off her computer and stuffs it into a leather bag her father gave her when she graduated from college. How long ago was that? It seems like it's been years, even though it's been only a few. Muscle memory rather takes over as she mechanically runs through her virtual list of things to do before her boyfriend arrives in his new black Citroën sedan – what a strange word, sedan, like the chairs ridden by Egyptian royalty or British colonials on backs of the proletariat. Katherine certainly isn't royalty to anyone. She walks down the white hallway to the bathroom and gathers up her contact solution, toothpaste, lotions and travel-sized shampoo while cursing the TSA agents who will be sure to search her bags when they scan them and realize she is attempting to carry-on liquids over 3.5 oz. That size might be enough for a “little person,” to be P.C. but not for any real person. “Oh well,” Katherine thinks, “they might as well give me a hard time, at least I'll be prepared for it.”

She always thought that anyone who became a TSA agent had old scores to settle and therefore treated everyone that came through the security line at the airport with deep-seated resentment. She pictures the old woman with the oxygen machine who takes longer by default to go through with her bags, the man who has to be tediously patted-down because he has a defibrillator and

therefore cannot walk through metal detectors or the general individual who has not read any of the current literature on the best practices of airport safety or is just lazy. No jewelry, pockets need to be change, no watches, belts, shoes, - yes it all has to come off. For the thousandth-and-one time, all liquids must be contained in a plastic baggie. The job is a tough one, comparable to the NYPD, these agents are on the front-lines protecting America from having a good flight.

“We should give them more credit, Archimedes.”

Archimedes, Katherine's marmalade cat is still lounging on the sofa in the next room. He may or may not be listening to Katherine's thoughts, afflicted, like her mother and grandmother, with selective hearing. She took her chances.

“Ah what I would give to hear your thoughts...” she muses.

She's walking away into her bedroom. It's cramped but the window is large and opens into the garden out front she needs to start packing her luggage. She's more throwing things into her suitcases – a set from London Fog, yet another gift from her parents. What she would do to just have one more year of undergraduate.

“You know kitty cat, maybe I shouldn't have graduated so early...Hm.” She thinks, “But I was so over it. You know.” She's still talking to Archimedes, “*you* know.”

The cat is purring, not realizing that when Katherine is finished packing, after she has instagrammed her way onto the web, preserving her preparations for travel.

And the packing begins... #nycbound



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She's going to be packing the cat up too: rounding up his food bowl, favorite ball of (yes) yarn. Katherine had made it for him while she was attempting a relaxation method before her exams last year. She picks up his catbed – an oval shaped feather pillow with walls perfect for rubbing up against and pushing your entire body against for maximum stretch and comfort. Such is the life of a cat, not easy, but certainly stylish. Katherine's learned the trick is to look effortless, pretending you did not spend half of an afternoon of licking yourself while watching your owner hunched over her laptop. Because with fur that well-groomed, word gets around. Even sans high-speed internet.

Katherine is now counting her earrings and other sundry presents, making sure she has enough gift boxes and tags to hold everything when she and her mother retire to the dining room, a converted Santa's workshop. Transformed by wrapping paper, scotch tape, ribbons and brightly colored intricate plastic children's toys, for the younger cousins.

"If I were Jewish, we'd only have 8 presents." she says matter-of-factly. "Jesus, why am I not Jewish."

"As if he could answer you," Inigo responds for Archimedes as he is walking through the door (he has a key to the apartment – and a knack for entering places without a sound, a skill from his earlier days in Barcelona).

"God you scared me." Katherine says.

"Sorry."

"You are not."

"No, I'm not. Alright?"

"Yeah, you?"

"Fine, just splendid, can't wait to meet the future in-laws."

"Hush! You can't say that!"

"Wait...you didn't tell them?" He starts moving his shoulders up and down, his face reddening.

"You...WHAT?...Didn't you tell your parents we're engaged?"

"Inigo! Stop it!"

"I'm just, just, blinded by rage!"

“Inigo seriously!”

He relaxed his eyes and smiled, “alright Kate, sorry I scared you. Ready?”

“Yeah don't do that again. And what do you think?”

“Good point, you're never ready on time. What bag can I put in the car?”

“I would argue with you but we are out of time.” Katherine surveys the shipwreck that is her bedroom; clothes, hats, and shoes are scattered about.

“You mean you would argue if I wasn't right.”

“Um sure, I'll indulge your ego for the moment...Um...Take that one” she points to the biggest suitcase on the bed, “...please...let me just zip it up first.”

“Oh. Yeah. Zip it up, uh huh.”

“Gross. Here, take this to the car.”

Inigo rolls the suitcase, or drags it, back down the hallway towards the front door. He stops at the front door to check his phone.

“No new e-mails, huh,” he sighs. He's waiting for the confirmation email notifying him that their transatlantic seats have been upgraded to first class – a Christmas present, compliments of his new promotion. He has yet to tell Kate, but how could she be upset with him? The details of the job, admittedly, entail longer hours and more trips outside the UK. That, she may not be too keen on. Oh well, she'll be surprised enough with the complimentary champagne and seats that fold into beds, she won't even really be listening to him describe his new responsibilities. In the lap of luxury, the ends justify the means.

He checks his Twitter feed.



“Oh! Hey Kate, guess what’s on Twitter?”

“Yeah?”

“You're supposed to say what back to me...whatever. Guess what.”

“Tell me.”

“Guess what is happening tonight at midnight?”

“Hmmm. Well, let’s see. Some kind of apocalyptic concert?”

“How did you know! Everyone is going to be there, even Eric Clapton via his greatest hits – babe, we have to go, we have to!”

“Freddy sent me the Facebook event this morning.”



“I’m so excited.”

“Yeahh...me too, so proud of my little bro for throwing a party.” Katherine looks down at her handiwork, “think I’m all done!”

There’s a letter in the post basket by the door, unopened. “Kate what’s this?” he asks.

“Because I know exactly what you’re talking about Inigo,” she yells back.

“What is this unopened letter?”

“What?”

“Uhh, this one in the basket? It’s addressed to a Miss Katherine Bloome from *Proceedings A*.”

“Oh, no idea, don’t worry about it WE HAVE TO GOOOO!” Katherine’s voice sounds like the Spanish soccer announcer’s on Univision after a team scores.

“Yeah but what is it? Don’t you want to open it?”

“No time. Out of time. Will you pack up Archimedes please? His food is..”

“Under the sink, yeah I know, babe. I still think you should open this letter it looks important!”

“It’ll still be here when I get back, plus if it’s a bill, better *not* open it.”

“Um..really? You know it’s not a bill!”

“No I’m just saying it, if it were a bill it would have already been opened.” She stands before Inigo in the hallway, rolling suitcase carry-on and personal item, a purple skinny Marc Jacobs knockoff, in tow.

“Ready babe?”

“Ready.”

Inigo looks at his watch, “wow I'm impressed.”

“How'd I do?”

“twenty minutes and 47 seconds.”

“Not bad. Did I PR?”

“Nope, not today. Your record still holds from three months ago – remember? Swiss trip 2012 you had your shit together in eighteen minutes flat.”

“Oh yeah that was epic.”

“From that moment on, I knew I had found the woman I was supposed to end up with.”

“Glad we're that deep of a couple.”

“Now let's get this little guy over to...” Inigo scrunches up his nose and his voice becomes high-pitched, “ahem Mrs. Smythe.”

“Yep, let me just take a pic of all this for instagram.”

“Oh great idea Kate! We can show the WORLD your packing skills and spend an extra three minutes doing nothing.”

“Stop, you know you're going to tweet about this.”

“Already did.”

“Oh yeah, got the notification like twenty seconds ago. But I haven't had time to look at it! Obviously. Was it about me or was I just included?”



“Now it is all about you Kate.”

“Nice. Thanks. Let's go.”

“Okay. First though, please open this letter. It's from the Academy.”

“*The Academy* my darling what *do* you mean? There are several academies in Britain.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Stop fucking with me and let's get in the car.”

“I'm not Kate, I mean it, it's from the Royal Society, you should open this. Did you send them something.”

“Yeah I did, a while ago – but it's probably a rejection letter and I don't need that before I face my family's rejection. So let's. Please. Just. Go.”

“What if it isn't a rejection? What if they want to honor you or publish you or something? Aren't you the least bit curious?”

“Of course I'm curious, but I don't want a letter 'kindly letting me know' I'm not good enough and that what I'm studying is a complete waste of time. It would ruin the lovely holiday trip I've arranged for months now with the man I love going to see my parents in good old NYC.”

“So you're not going to open it.”

“That's all you got from that? That's it?”

“Well I love you too Katherine Bloome, and I'm very excited to meet your familia.”

“So then let's go.” Katherine says as her boyfriend looks at her silently. “No I'm not opening that damn letter and if you ask me one more time I'll be a pain for the rest of the holiday.”

“Fine. Give me your bags,” he says, and shuffles out the door.

Katherine takes one more look around the apartment. She checks the stove, the oven, the coffee pot to make sure they are all turned off. Then she moves to the laundry room to shut the water pipes off. She looks around one last time and picks up Archimedes' carrier with one hand.

“alright,” she says to him, looking at her cat through the bars of his travel cage sympathetically. She sometimes feels caged in, like she can't get out, the look of needing to be let out, of hoping someone will open the door, is what initially drew Katherine to Archimedes at the shelter. “This is it,” she thinks aloud, “time to go.”

Katherine looks through the front window and sees Inigo slamming his trunk closed, or trying to, forcing her overstuffed luggage down to fit in the tiny trunk space. “God I hope it's under fifty,” she says.

Closing the front drapes, she puts the cat on the floor, “Hey Arch,” she says to him, “watch the place, will you? I know you’ll be across the street, but on the occasion, make sure we’re alright.”

She imagines him responding in a dignified southern drawl, “But of course, my dear, always.”

“Out we go.”

<text to Dad> 1:31 pm

Walking out the door Dad, will call you when we’re through security. I love you!

<text to Dad> 1:31 pm

\*I’m

## Chapter 3 - Silas

Christmas this year falls on a Tuesday. The Friday before, the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, the students at Trinity School on the Upper West Side are still expected to attend classes. Silas Bloome has been waiting, as most eighth graders are want to do, for this day since the beginning of the school year in late August.

With the cold weather coming in, and Hurricane Sandy about a month behind them, weekends – the saving grace in the monotony of adolescent education - for Trinity boys are becoming unbearably short. Filled with indoor soccer games in New Jersey, social events in Midtown and ill-attended family dinners at home, there has been less time to be thirteen than a mini adult, less time for “mucking about,” as Dr. Amos of anthropology might say. The students, K-12, rapidly approaching a state of apathy as 2012 draws to a close, have taken to labeling everything in their young, privileged and online lives as #meh. It is only somewhat surprising that young Silas is an anomaly here, a kid from the Lower West Side. He doesn't fake ownership to what isn't his – the turf, the entitlement. He has been training himself over the last year to will away his Nolita-bred eccentricities in order to survive the shower of barbs cast by the “in” crowd on those (un)fortunate enough to remain on the “out.”

His crop of thick, blonde hair reminds the Madison Ave mothers of their favorite Calvin Klein models, men and women. It's a family mystery from who's side he gets his hair and handsomely effeminate features, though one person keeps the truth locked away. He would be an instant favorite with the girls who parade Trinity's narrow hallways if he was less aware of his intelligence. Silas is intellectual and carefree and charming, traits that have been cancelled out by the stuffiness of “old money” legacies and his school uniform – generic brand khakis not designer, chunky brown shoes from the vintage shop off Bleecker, and a blue polo with the official Trinity crest just below an over-flattened collar which looks more lapel than collar. He wonders why he still has to wear the most basic iteration of the uniform when his peers get to wear their own stylish accessories and carry around handbags and leather messenger bags. When did it become unacceptable to have a Jansport? But it isn't a question here about who has and who has not, it is a question of who has and who has more.

All other things being equal, Silas appreciates the level of his education at Trinity. Since being accepted in sixth grade, his parents have encouraged him to take advantage of all the school has to offer, which is quite a lot. Though his classmates live the lives of trust-fund babies, most students are actually high achieving and very smart and almost all of them face enormous expectations from their parents and grandparents to grow the family's wealth. Silas' friends at school are planning on doing the same thing as previous generations have: attending an Ivy League college, joining a social club and networking their way to the top of the commercial world. Maybe some will become doctors or professors, but the accessible billion-dollar market isn't for do-gooders or scholars, it's for ruthless risk-takers with plenty of start-up capital, low



accountability and an entrepreneurial spirit. It isn't easy, it takes wit and a competitive spirit. And that's exactly the type of dog Trinity breeds.

At Trinity, everyone has the core quartet of required classes (math, science, Language Arts, History), two free periods for extra-curricular activities and one study hall. In his free time, Silas runs the Model UN chapter during first period, holding weekly meetings with the delegates from each region. Mondays are reserved for Oceania and Australia because they never have too much new business to report. Tuesdays have commanded the attention of Latin and Central America. On Wednesdays he braces himself for the impact of Africa and the Middle East and recently, both areas have been vying for his attention. Thursday is Asia and Friday, a double period, Silas meets with Europe and North America separately. The entire Model UN delegation convenes once a quarter, unless the President calls a special crisis session in which, after positively petitioning the chapter's advisor Mr. Bettes and Trinity's Principal Froimison, all representatives get three periods off of school to participate, as long as the Secretary turns in the attendance and makes special note of which delegates got up and walked out. Model UN was started by Silas last year in a fit of desperation at feeling powerless to change the situation in Iraq and enraged by the *The New York Times'* spotty coverage of the Malian coup.

Instead of joining the Trinity Young Democrats Society, an organization which he felt had ulterior motives for existing, he searched for what was missing. His history teacher suggested establishing a Model UN, since the real United Nations building is right down the street. Though none of the resolutions his convention passes will actually be put into action, Silas has an outlet in which to apply his critical thinking, leadership and rebellious talents. Truth be told, his Model UN runs more like a House of Commons, unruly and honest, than the real UN, something he takes especial pride in. He at least feels his free period is not wasted by staring at a computer screen watching stock prices escalate and crash in Mock-Wall-Street. A new class offered for the first time this year, attendance was maxed out and the waiting list for the class is twenty-three deep. It is rumored that some eighth graders who didn't get into the class will be selling their spots on the waiting list to the highest underclassman bidder, the price is expected to be exorbitant considering most of the students at Trinity refuse to spend less than their daily allowance walking from their private cars through the school's gates. How? The few well-known drug dealers, who also happen to be the sons of the top corporate CEOs in Manhattan, make it far too easy to buy. On a microscopic level, their style of macro haphazard and nonsensical bartering is a complex system of price floors, subsidies and trade agreements planned several months in advance by a program running on a computer server mutually owned and updated by the dealers. Silas only buys, and usually just whenever he knows Freddy's coming home, when the prices are artificially decreased to inflate demand. Typically it's right before the dealers get a new stash. Silas knows how to appreciate the beauty of the system without investing much. He stays aloof, like a James Bond.

Post-Hurricane Sandy, schoolwork has disappeared. Dealing with #traumaticstress, Trinity's School Board decided on giving students and teachers an extra period of "academic leave" before midterm exams the first week of January. So study hall, the last period of the day, has

been more a waste of time than anything. Lucky for every male in the room, a transplant from the Brooklyn High School of the Arts, one of the hardest hit schools, has kept everyone's attention.

Madeline Greyson is a fox, it's been decided. Her chestnut hair, kinked from two unraveled french braids, looks different and better every day.

She plays the cello, sings and dances. In orchestra, her fingers are cautious to take steady aim and hesitate above the strings in anticipation of the next note. It's a different style of playing and Silas, intrigued, misses his own entrances (on the bass) and has to scramble to catch up with the rest of the section. He'd like to think there exists a relationship between Maddie's technique, the angles of her body position and her personality. But so far, no dice. Around her neck there is a thin golden chain which Silas is sure holds a delicate golden cross. It must be nestled in her small snowy breasts. Thoughts like these have kept Silas a prisoner. #SeventhGrade

So this morning as Silas is jumping down the spiraling wooden steps from his bedroom on the third floor of his brownstone to the kitchen, he is already wishing for the day's end. 'Tis the plight of youth to think of time as dispensable!

He pauses. In the air is the aroma of Mrs. Bloome's peasantesque blueberry and basil scones. Cooling peacefully on the criss-cross black wire rack, the scones knowingly beckon hunger as a gloved hand betrays a coquettish nature. Silas reaches with dilated pupils towards the choicest of them all.

"Silas Webster you touch that scone and you are dead meat mister," he hears his mother's voice command. Whipping around, he expects her to be behind him. "You know that is not for you," she says. But there is no one there.

"Ooh, that's creepy," Silas thinks aloud. He respectfully nods to the nearly victimized cupcake, "sorry," he apologizes and walks over to the pantry.

"WHAT DO WE HAVE TO EEEEEEEAT?" he mouths to the cat Margeaux who's just now joined him in the kitchen and is watching with her orb-like yellow eyes, his involuntary yawn caused by the expansion of his esophageal muscles. He pushes the box of his father's plain Cheerios over, grunting in disgust, and forages for the Cap'n Crunch.

"Hello old standby," he says to himself out loud as he gathers the rest of the necessary components for breakfast. His pajama pocket buzzes and he shivers as it stimulates his right testicle. "Get yourself together man," he thinks.

<text from Cody> 7:40 am  
dude get online

<text from Silas> 7:41 am  
?

<text from Cody> 7:42  
just do it

He logs into the family computer. AIM pops up on the screen.

<[BrownBear891@aim.com](mailto:BrownBear891@aim.com)> 7:49 am  
Yo Si wats up sry its so early

<Siborg9> 7:50 am  
np man just eating brkfst

<Siborg9> 7:50 am  
need somethin?

<BrownBear891> 7:50 am  
was just wondering if we have a quiz in math today

<BrownBear 891> 7:51 am  
AND

<Siborg9> 7:54 am  
& wat???????

<BrownBear891>  
here about MG

<Siborg9>  
hm?

<BrownBear891>  
zomg yu dont kno

<Siborg9>  
know wat

<BrownBear891>  
ok i'll tel u but 1<sup>st</sup> tell me if we have a test

<Siborg9>  
o um dont think so

<BrownBear891>

u sure

<Siborg9>

no but we could get out of it if we had to

<BrownBear891>

SKIPP????

<Siborg9>

no idiot

<BrownBear891>

then how

<Siborg9>

just keep Mr. G talking.

<Siborg9>

he luvs talkig about himself

<BrownBear891>

tel me about it

<Siborg9>

he loves talking about himself lol

<BrownBear891>

nicee

<Siborg9>

whats up with MG

<BrownBear891>

what?

<Siborg9>

dude come one!

<BrownBear891>

ez tiger let me tel u a story

<BrownBear891>

ps orange juice is awesome

<Siborg9>  
im about to logoff

<BrownBear891>  
i wuldnt do that

<Siborg9>  
ok so tel me ihave to get my stuff ready for skool

<BrownBear891>  
ok real quik - she wants 2 ak you somethin 2day

<Siborg9>  
she knos who i am?

<BrownBear891>  
jeah

<Siborg9>  
ur jokin

<BrownBear891>  
no way man im serious

<BrownBear891>  
she said it last nite online

<Siborg9>  
y wasn't i on???

<BrownBear891>  
dunno but ya better find hr today b4 break u kno?

<Siborg9>  
think so?

<BrownBear891>  
y wait?

<BrownBear891>  
this is it man

<BrownBear891>  
ur big chance!  
<BrownBear891>

wat uve been wanting!

<BrownBear891>  
go for the gold

<BrownBear891>  
#Olympics2012

<Siborg9>  
lol CODY

<BrownBear891>  
wat?

<Siborg9>  
i got it man

<Siborg9>  
i got it

<BrownBear891>  
just showing u some support brosef

<Siborg9>  
i dig it man

<Siborg9>  
thanks for the heads up

<BrownBear891>  
anytime

<BrownBear891>  
so see you in like 10 min?

<Siborg9>  
jeah

<BrownBear891>  
can u steal me one ur moms scones?

<Siborg9>  
ill ask

<BrownBear891>  
k

<BrownBear891>  
its the best

<Siborg9>  
i kno

<BrownBear891>  
k cya soon

<Siborg9>  
cya

They were best friends since elementary school. Living on the Upper East side, the pair was an unlikely match, but match they were. Silas was never jealous out loud, rather he asked his mother if they could afford living near Central Park – and if they could, why didn't they? Proximity to Trinity might help him fit in better with the rest of his grade.

“We tried it once honey, and it wasn't for us,” she had said.

Cody had a real back yard and a dog and a nanny who used to take him for walks and buy him waffles from the waffle truck by Turtle Pond whenever he asked politely. The Upper East Side was also a lot less dangerous than the Lower West end.

“Not necessarily, Silas,” Mrs. Bloome chided, “there is more crime in the golden ghetto than meets the eye.”

## Chapter 4 - Dr. Bloome

<Text from You> 10:37

Going in to surgery now love, talk to you after. I love you

It's strange, the preparation. It never changes, never gets old. It's a symphony you've done a thousand times. A symphony. The scrub brushes, bristly on one side, soft and smooth on the other – they're the winds, the iodine that squeezes out of the sponge, the brass. The brown liquid turned your hands yellow until you wash it out with the percussion section, running gushing water; it rushed into the galley sink. Water is capable of saving and destroying the world, your world, and you've seen it do both. You used to think of women in the same way. The sound of the splashing hushed your other thoughts, brought you to a focus, like the cavernous voice of a bass drum or the persnickety assertiveness of a snare. Zshhhhh! You freed the detachable nail brush, nestled in the soft side of the scrub sponge. It felt good, felt right, to shed the grime of humanity - collected under fingernails. And you. You are always the maestro, the conductor, *il direttore* as Rosemary might say. You were careful to keep your fingers always pointing up, elbows at ninety degrees at all times. By now the habit you needed to learn in medical school has become part of the routine, part of the musical interpretation that is no longer thought of, but intuited.

At some point, you finished and turned off the water with a foot pedal. A nurse dried your hands and you began to dance. You've performed this and performed and repeated it and yet still sometimes you need to mark it to remind yourself of what comes next. It's hard to know when exactly you transitioned to ballet, your eyes were elsewhere. The dressing first: in gown, gloves - one hand at a time, doubled – mask, cap, goggles – today you wore the racquetball goggles, the ones you bought from Sam's Club because they fit best under pressure - and the spelunking headlamp – for when you explore the avant garde depths of this woman, your patient. Her organs are the same and different and you step aside like Shakespeare's greatest characters and slash the fourth wall – the one standing between you and the audience, the surgical staff, the beeping anesthesia machines, puls-ox, Bovie, instruments – with your scalpel blade. You've heard of musicians greeting their violins, trumpets, pianos, triangles before playing them. You like to acknowledge your tools with a nod, a silent “thank you” in appreciation of their variety, efficiency and near-perfect technology that will allow you to extract as much of the corrupted tissue as you can without injuring the innocent.

It's hard to know how many beats you held the final dischord before the Resolution. But you did, at some point. And you moved along. By moving along, you've learned you never have to let go; unless you need to.

You felt in your heart, as you have again and again, that this ritual scrubbing is only a mortal kind of cleansing – different than Confession; there is no penance to complete in surgery save the Our Father you recite before you make the initial incision. Original Sin, that has forever tainted us, has given you your life's work. Secretly you respect the devil, for his actions have allowed you to serve others and He has made you guardian of the soul's armor.



In medieval times, you may have been called a page. Or a sorcerer.

<Rosemary mobile> 10:38

Go get em tiger. I love you too, be safe.

You were holding the patient's chart in one arm and her hand in the other before you went to scrub. She was lying on the table in drapes, looking up at the ceiling, squeezing your fingers tightly, while the anesthesiologist, Dr. Wand, Erich, puts her to sleep. You watched her as she relaxed and felt her hand go limp and fall out of grip with yours.

Cases with Erich seem to go by faster when he's in the room. He's a talented anesthesiologist, maybe that's it. But maybe it's because he brings his iPad in and sits and will read the front page of the New York Times aloud because doesn't everyone want to hear about the news while extracting a carcinoma? All the while he'll be watching the anesthesia machines, keeping track of the patient's vitals, in a way. The nurses do most of it. Erich's there in case something goes very wrong. He sometimes plays Angry Birds or another game adapted for mobile devices that has transcended the generation and technological gap.

He likes to give a detailed play-by-play, but over time you've managed to tune that out. His voice has faded into the white noise of whatever your nurse practitioner is playing on Pandora. Dr. Wand's expletive-soaked ejaculations become bothersome, louder, only at the climax of his emotion, when the game freezes or the network cuts out or he loses a life, when the virginity of the operating room, cleaned and sterilized and pure, is taken, legs spread out of control. It's trending.

#goddammitihatethisiPaditneverletsmebeatanythingiswearithassomethingagainstmnothingeverworksandtheappsareallscrewedupallthetimeicanbarelycheckmyfinancialstatementswithoutgettinga”pushnotification”orthebatterydraininginhalfanhourimeanthebatteryissupposedtolastfortenhoursandthispieceofshitbarelygivesmethree

You wished he would just learn to keep his (strung-out) thoughts to himself. Erich's negativity is infectious. There is no immunity or available cure for cynicism. He sighed and got up to walk around the table and inspect your work haughtily. Oh well, it's just like when you played rugby in medical school – operating with Dr. Wand in the room. Intense, annoying, chummy. You wanted to hate the guys on your team because they could be jackasses, but then again they were the best people you knew – they'd stick by you no matter what. And wasn't that what ultimately mattered? You always wondered why they took to you, or how you got involved with the sport, being on the library team all through college. You never partied, really, you weren't even in a fraternity. Rugby was your first brush with such raw, intimate...primal athleticism.

It was teammates like PoBoy (a Cleveland native) and The Colonel (from Kentucky) that kept you coming out to the field every day. Brotherhood, that's what it was. And that's what you feel

for Erich, even though you might deny it. There is some connection that makes you dread and appreciate being in OR-4B with Dr. Wand. For however long it took, however many rounds of Fruit Ninja or Air Mail you needed to go to finish what you had started long before today, you were glad to have Erich with you in crunch time. Before the surgery, before the pre-op visit, the discussion with the family, the prognosis, the diagnosis, the tests, the third and second visits. The first visit, the kickoff. Now you were about to finish what you started, finish the season. If you went down and wouldn't make it to the playoffs, you would need a strategy to bounce back, no sidelines. Your team was only as good as your weakest player. And that's why you needed, need, needed, Erich on your team, on the field, in the room. No one can be everything you expect them to be, they just have to be close.

But close isn't enough in oncology.

You thought, maybe it is for the orthopedic surgeons, and stifled a laugh because breathing too heavily fogs up your racquetball goggles. Too late. Erich was just done giving your patient anesthesia when he glanced up, a witness to the revealing temporary condensation on your lenses.

“Graham,” he said, smiling with his eyes that were grey-blue like the waves in the Homer painting you like so much, the one with the sailor in the breakers. “We all know how difficult this surgery is, doc,” he continued. He rolled his eyes and sat back in the chair you never used.

His attitude sometimes reminds you of Miranda, your younger sister. Growing up, still, she is the most expressive person you know, never hesitating to allow her facial muscles, all 43 of them, to betray her true feelings for you; you always beat her in poker. Even via Skype, on the occasion your schedules intersect – she still lives in Argentina – the virtual image of her fine-features affirms her sustaining depth of wearable emotion. Whenever you think of her, you think of home, you miss it. But only a little. There is so much here for you, like Rosemary. Your family. Your life. Your mother, God rest her soul, would tell you to count your blessings - among other things.

Growing up in Buenos Aires was a bit like living in a Marquez novel, you thought. Not like *Evita*, how you hate that musical. Nothing in Argentina is as it seems, nothing ever is. But at the southern end of South America, everyone has a secret behind their eyes. And only sometimes in a bad way. More often, that girl glancing at you shyly from across the white brick plaza who is more beautiful than any other girl you've ever seen, even in a magazine, is not shy at all, but fiercely independent and headstrong. She's been taught that her shiny black hair and caramel honey skin are gifts from God and instead of flaunting them, she wears them self-consciously. You thought you lived in love from the moment you were born in Buenos Aires and you still don't know why you came to the United States. But the past is not worth regretting is it.

Instead, you focused on counting the number of times your patient's vein tapped through her skin. “Thanks Dr. Wand,” you said. 80 over 100. Not bad. But that's the way everything usually

starts out, not bad. It's those times when not bad becomes bad becomes worse the good surgeons are separated from the rest.

It's not always glamorous, this life. Your girlfriend in med school, Christin, the woman you honestly thought you were going to spend the rest of your life with, who still sometimes comes up in conversations and dreams. She used to say that surgery is about “controlled arrogance” and you hated when she was right. But by the end, though, you couldn't tell if you were hating it all because she was right or because she was her.

Christin was studying anatomy, at the time. To everyone else it was called “theater” or “drama” or “the arts.” But to Chris, her black box was the origin of expression and experience. It was the human body bared to its fundamental elements – skin, joints, fingers, eyes, emotion. She would talk about how the words in a play didn't really matter (you wanted to ask – did anything matter to her? But didn't because in your low and her high you knew the words could never come out as you wanted them to). What did matter were the people on the stage and the way they angled their bodies, exploring every crevice, secret depression, opening, nerve ending. You never remember what they say do you? She pressed. You thought about it...No. But then again, you never really paid attention to anything in that dark room, you were used to light. Chris' theory was that it wasn't the lines or the poetic verse or any of it, it was the actors on stage and the interpretation of the words through the body that made theater – *real theater*.

So you lived, together sometimes, in an apartment near the University in Providence, first, then Chicago. The lease said no pets but Chris went to the humane society one day and bought a puppy. I guess she thought you'd take care of “Brock” because she couldn't. You took him back to the shelter after a few weeks, but it killed you and she knew it.

It was lucky you were studying to be a doctor and were comfortable with needles. It was just one of those decades, you know, when everyone did it. The 80s, man. And you were safe, you stole the sterilized needles out of the supply closet from the hospital – you weren't the only one – by the handfuls. But you were really only there for the music. That might have been why she left you. Not once, not twice. You got used to her tirades, her hissy fits, which in addition to her mood swings – those were alright, you didn't psychoanalyze – just got old after a while. It was like she was protesting nothing. In the end. And there was an end. You saw it coming, if no one else did. Why couldn't you have just given in, just shot up more, taken a hit more, relaxed bro? You didn't know. Except that you did, maybe. At least there was the music. Always the music. It was what made Chris keep coming back for more, begging for one look from you. She was in the front that night, in the crowd, and you were on the stage in a threadbare t-shirt from Walmart and blue jeans from somewhere else. Rosemary was there too, but you didn't see her. It was an unusually warm October night and you could play and Scotty Freel was out there watching you and you knew you were good. It was your break. You had talent, you were real, you were the only thing anyone hung on to, smoked on without getting strung-out, biologically, that is. It was early life and no one had control over anything. International diplomacy had been shot to hell, almost literally, and everyone in Chicago thought they were the Beats reincarnate. They weren't.

And you played the crowd like it was made for you. And the bass. Not your traditional guitar or drums or keyboard – the bass was different, it could be anything you wanted it to be. An extension of you. Sex, sadness, insanity. Or just you.

(Later, when you were making your Facebook profile, you asked Kate to help you put down that you were in a relationship. You wanted “it's complicated” with “my bass” though you hardly ever played it anymore.)

Those were the days. Chris, Mel, Drew, Trix. The gang. Now all grown up. Those were the days.

But it felt like everyone was saying that. You wondered if there was ever a time when people thought the present was better than the past. You saw Owen Wilson in *Midnight in Paris*, that Woody Allen movie you saw with Freddy up in Hanover, and thought that it was cute and that Marion Cotillard was very French. But you left feeling empty. You and your wife left the theater and looked at each other and didn't need to ask “do we wish we were back there?” You wanted the answer to be “no,” but you didn't need to pretend in front of each other anymore. The answer was yes, anything to get back to the way things used to be.

She told you then that she loved you after only three months. It was too soon, but she smiled and looked down at her periwinkle blue Keds with scuff marks from her aerobics classes and traced the grass stains on her jeans she got from smoking in the grass and you didn't have the heart to tell her you didn't feel the same way. So you came to love her like you loved the Cold War – with Rosemary there was no grey, just black and white, in or out.

Did you both feel like you wanted to go back there, to your twenties when you took a bus from Chicago to Pittsburgh and somehow made your way to New York City? Of course. You remembered going through towns with the same names: you passed three Danvilles and four Springfields and thought about going back when you were more than halfway there. You ran out of weed, met a couple with one tooth between them, and slept in the last of the northeast's great hay fields. Of course you wanted to go back. You always wanted what you knew you could never have.

You drew the lines on your patient's body in black where you were planning on to make incisions. It was one of three times during surgery when your patient became more than the sum human anatomy before you. She became the woman who had come to see you several times for an office visit, a consultation, and a pre-op. You thought about the secrets she said in front of you, things that even her husband doesn't know about her. You weren't a therapist, you were more like a friend. Health is the heart of happiness and you always make a point of taking the time to listen. But after you make the lines, you ride yourself of all ties to her. Surgery should be emotionless. Like meditation.

Life used to be authentic, you thought. What was it now? You and Rosemary looked at each other and sighed. This is #asgoodasitgets you thought, but didn't say because, after all, you were happy.

People never appreciate what they have when they have it. Once, Freddy broke the microwave. It was 1996 and Freddy loved pop-tarts. His favorite was the s'more kind; he had graduated from the classic brown sugar cinnamon by the fifth grade. (This was when Rosemary was putting in 18 hours a day as the sous-chef for three different elite restaurants and you were working full time at the hospital and neither of you had time to watch your children's nutritional intake.) Freddy was the son who never followed directions. Instead of using the toaster to heat his pop-tarts, as suggested on the box, Freddy liked zapping his breakfast of pre-diabetic champions in the microwave. He always took off the mirror-like wrapper off before sticking the two chocolate and marshmallow pastry-wafers on a half-sheet of a paper towel and into the microwave. You were convinced he was going to be a neurosurgeon by the way he so delicately sliced open the shiny, vacuum sealed 5x7 package with his weapon of choice – a pizza cutter. He never deviated from routine and always cut on a straight line and you were actually proud of his prodigious motor skills (they reminded you of your bassist days). You wondered if you should have encouraged him more to go into medicine. The day after Katherine's twelfth birthday party, instead of putting his pop-tarts on a paper towel, he used a paper plate from the night before. Katherine was going through a marine biology phase and had insisted that her party be “Under the Sea” themed so all plates, napkins and favors were illustriously decorated with shiny sea animal stickers. A few lucky fishes had found themselves on Freddy's plate of choice and after a few seconds in the microwave on high, burst into tiny flames. Your son's initial reaction was of admiration for the way the fire seemed to rise up directly from the plate and for the distinctly campfire smell permeating the kitchen. You were only mildly worried when the security company called to alert you that your smoke alarm went off. It was not an extraordinary occurrence in your household. Somehow, Freddy had managed to contain the fire to the microwave, but not before the flames blackened the interior and crisped the internal wiring system rendering the microwave useless. That was extraordinary – you had nothing to eat in its absence. Rosemary was the most ashamed. You never looked at another kitchen appliance the same again, even if you thought it was as unnecessary as a microzester.

You laughed as you made the first incision and felt the new nurse anesthetist judge you with her pursed lips. The room let out a collective sigh. The wound filled with blood, a dark red pool. Not many surgeons used the scalpel which is maybe why you kept at it, to preserve tradition, to be different. You barely concentrated on the next few steps, the motions were just repetition.

“Bovie,” you said, sticking your hand out to the right.

A nurse placed the Bovie pen in your palm and you led the blue cord down away from your wrist. You pushed down with your index finger on the blue button and pressed it along the incision to cauterize the small veins. Then you were on to the yellow button to cut through the fascia. The Bovie made a high pitched beeping noise and a buzzing sound when the metal tip

touched uncovered flesh. Progress was measured. The motion of your hand on the Bovie digging into your patient's abdominal region, slicing through layers seemed calculated. The whole process was like an integral: the total area of infinitely tiny strokes of the Bovie's tip against tissue. Now and then you'd hit a blood vessel which would erupt like a volcano of blood soaking into the yellow fatty tissue around it. You took the lap sponge and mopped up the mess and switched your finger from yellow to blue, to coag. Beeeeeeeep.

Everything in surgery is shades of either yellow or blue, you mused. Not grey. Ha! Blue gowns, blue shoe covers, blue masks, blue wires, blue linens: yellow Bovie pen, yellow fat, yellow urine draining into the catheter. You never got used to the feeling that you operated in this reality. Sometimes you convinced yourself that it was just imagination. And to an extent, the type of surgery you do is surreal. Exploratory. Navigating uncharted waters and fluids. Lymph fluids.

The operating room is a microcosm of life. There are deliverables and outcomes, predicted and theoretical. There are goals and ambitions, professional and personal, and people to help you get there. There are necrotic people you have no choice but to cut out. The only difference is time. Collapsible in the 300 square foot space, time is neither linear nor metric in the OR. Time, like the philosopher, is at the mercy of its constitution. In some instances, time can mean nothing and in others it can mean everything. Seconds of knowledge have the power to destroy years of wisdom.

You were cutting through the thin, strong fascial layer to access the abdominal cavity when you remembered that after you had Silas you thought the fascia is like a Dad because it kept everything together. But post-partum Rosemary used to wish that her fascia was less like a father and more like natural Spanx.

Looking into the abdomen, you reached your right hand out for the retractor and positioned it in place. You needed to drop the uterus to get a better view of the ovarian cysts using two medium clamps, gravity and the resident with you on rotation, Dr. Milo. Until now Dr. Milo had been watching the procedure from the observation room above, but you were ready for him and motioned for him to scrub in. To the untrained eye, your next few twists of the hand were complicated, involved and technically advanced. You had done it all before. When you were younger, you liked anything to do with magic – card tricks, hats, wands – and would practice for hours shuffling decks and making the bridges which you would flush out just to hear the sound. Your wrists were agile and you flicked your magic wand in intricate patterns each corresponding to an individual spell or hex impotoned by your fiendish, youthful imagination to solve the immediate problems of childhood boredom, vengeance, and yen. And the tight, graceful grip on the clamps? Calligraphy and chopsticks. Habits you developed sophomore year of college while dating Mai, the Vietnamese woman in your comparative religions seminar. She had sleek black hair and communist tendencies and very fine features. Your parents, like every other American born before 1940, were hesitant to accept her. She taught you to eat noodles and broth with two sticks in one hand – hence two clamps in one palm – with efficiency. She brought you to the art

museum to see their small Asian collection and entranced you, on subsequent evenings for the year and a half you were together, with the modesty and connectivity which defined her East.

You adjusted your headlamp and focused the beam to illuminate your fingertips. Navigating the female anatomy with ease had proven you successful in medical school, if not in high school. You reached alongside the uterus to find the ureters in place as they should be and packed the area with sponges, counting each one. Examining the major arteries and lymph nodes draining into the pelvic organs was next. Nothing out of the ordinary, it seemed. Relieved - this was the one place where the benign is always welcome.

You moved to extract tissue from the located ovarian cyst with the forceps and scissors. With a hemi clamp you sealed off the cyst's blood supply, grabbed the tissue with the toothed forceps and snipped through the sample in one downward push of your thumb. A dish was placed to your left into which you dropped the forceps and accompanying tissue to be analyzed in the lab. Now you waited, standing, for the lab results. You needed to be absolutely certain you were debulking the malignant tissue.

You looked at Dr. Wand, still on his iPad playing Fruit Ninja, and then at Dr. Milo and then at your scrub techs, nurses and finally you surveyed the chirping equipment. When did we need all of this? You thought, though you really meant When did we get so materialistic that we thought it was appropriate to operate with three pulse oximeters, nearly 200 instruments per surgical procedure, a \$50 co-pay, a \$3,000 deductible, a wife and three kids, a restaurant, a remodeled kitchen? Sometimes, you thought, it's hard to justify your life's expenditures.

“Dr. Bloome?” A voice came into the OR through the intercom.

“This is he.” You responded mechanically. You were still thinking about your family, your choices, your patient's choices. You hated idle time in the OR, it made you crazy. Or cray. Or whatever your children were saying now.

“This is Pathology with your results.”

The OR was quiet, the only noises were the whoosh whoosh of the anesthesia machine and the beeping of the pulse ox. It was at this time in your procedures you thought again about your patient, the woman on the table before you. Who was she really? You knew her “well” from the visits, more in the past few weeks, and you knew her basic information. You even had met her husband and eldest son, in his third-year of Law School at Villanova, who had come in with her once when his father couldn't. You knew her favorite color was purple, her favorite flower was the pansy because she had been a member of some sorority whose symbols were the Pansy, the Pearl and the Pine. You thought it had a nice ring to it, the alliteration. But the significance of the objects was lost to you – she had told you before, but you had forgotten, too focused on the details of her diagnosis and treatment. It hadn't always been this way, there used to be a time when you had time... You knew the intimate details of her sex life, past present and future, her

bouts of depression she chalked up to “just motherhood.” But who was she really? Did she secretly wish she had been a businesswoman instead of a journalist? Was going to the grocery store a struggle for her because she was constantly aware of calories, carbohydrates, or other people judging her by the contents of her cart which included Depends adult diapers for her incontinence? The world can be so harsh without reason. This last visit she had brought you an autographed picture of her sister with Bill Clinton when he was still on the nation's good side. Her sister had been a United Nations diplomat during the Clinton administration and she knew how much you liked the history of the Presidency and thought you would love the gift.

“Let's hear the results please,” you asked flatly.

“Dr. Bloome the sample you sent us appears to be a clear-cell carcinoma.”

Your face showed no reaction. “Does it look like its invaded into the capsule? How deep is the invasion?” You fired off the questions rapidly, needing answers. You weren't going to waste your patient's time any longer, not when she could be with her family. You thought about your family and for a moment you saw Silas and you and Freddy on the top of Camelback Mountain barechested, sweaty and smiling from your accomplishment during the heat of the Arizona day. You shook your head, you had to refocus.

“No Dr. Bloome, the capsule seems intact.”

“Thank you.”

“Pathology out.”

Always the audible click as the intercom is shut off on the other end and the 1 or 2 seconds-long pause that seems to last for minutes. You thought about the woman, your patient, your charge. This is not a good diagnosis, but what will this mean to her? You wondered how you would tell the family she may need follow-up chemotherapy or radiation treatment. That was the hardest part. Someone turned the suction back on and you snapped back to work, the rest of the surgery guided by pattern and repetition. All cases are different, and yet alike. It is almost like a game of chess – all the pieces are the same, but the players, the timing, the environment, while controlled, serious, and antiquated by practice, are all somehow slightly altered which in turn changes the outcome, changes your reactions, reflexes, decisions. You couldn't help but consider taking a bird's-eye-view of the situation, watching yourself Bovie off the demonic tissue, unpack the sponges, suction, clean, sew and bandage. It was your own silent movie and you were Charlie Chaplin without the mustache or the comedic relief. Any relief.

When you finished, you told Dr. Wand he could revive your patient. “Hang on,” he said, “let me just beat this level really quickly. She'll be fine for another minute.”

“Erich, please,” you begged, “her family is waiting.”



“Fine. But you owe me Screech.”

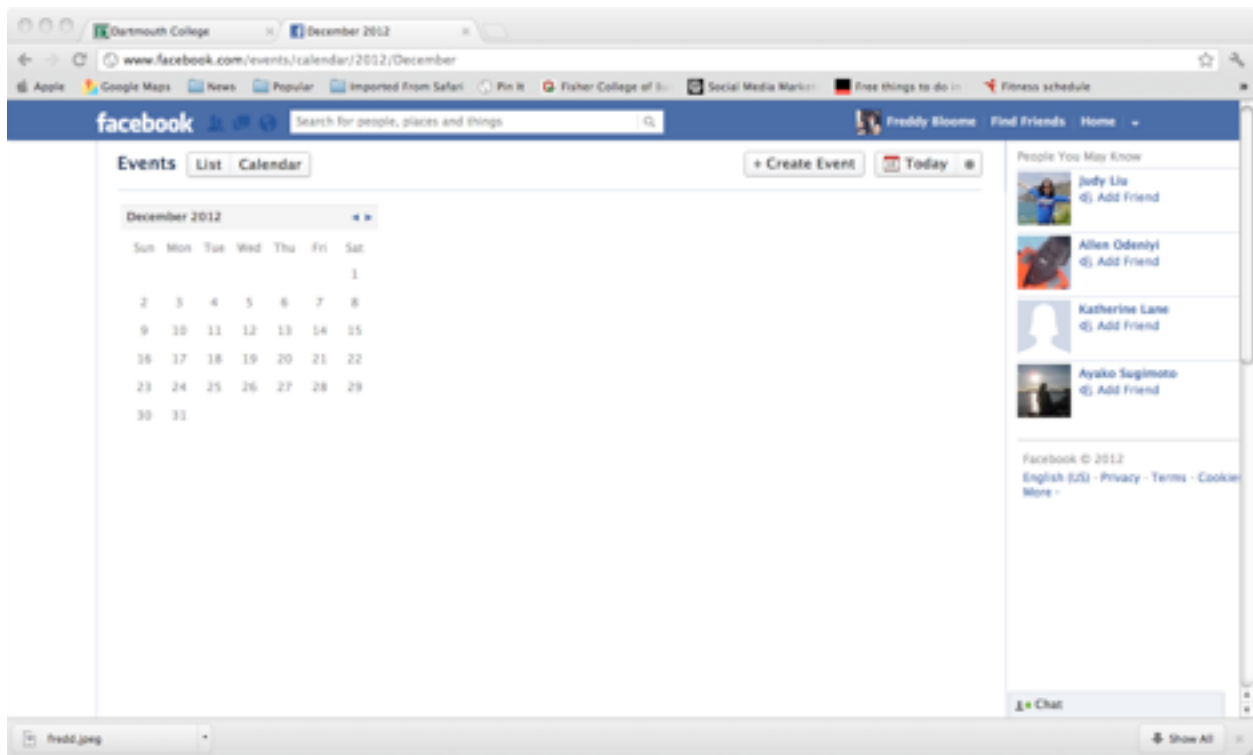
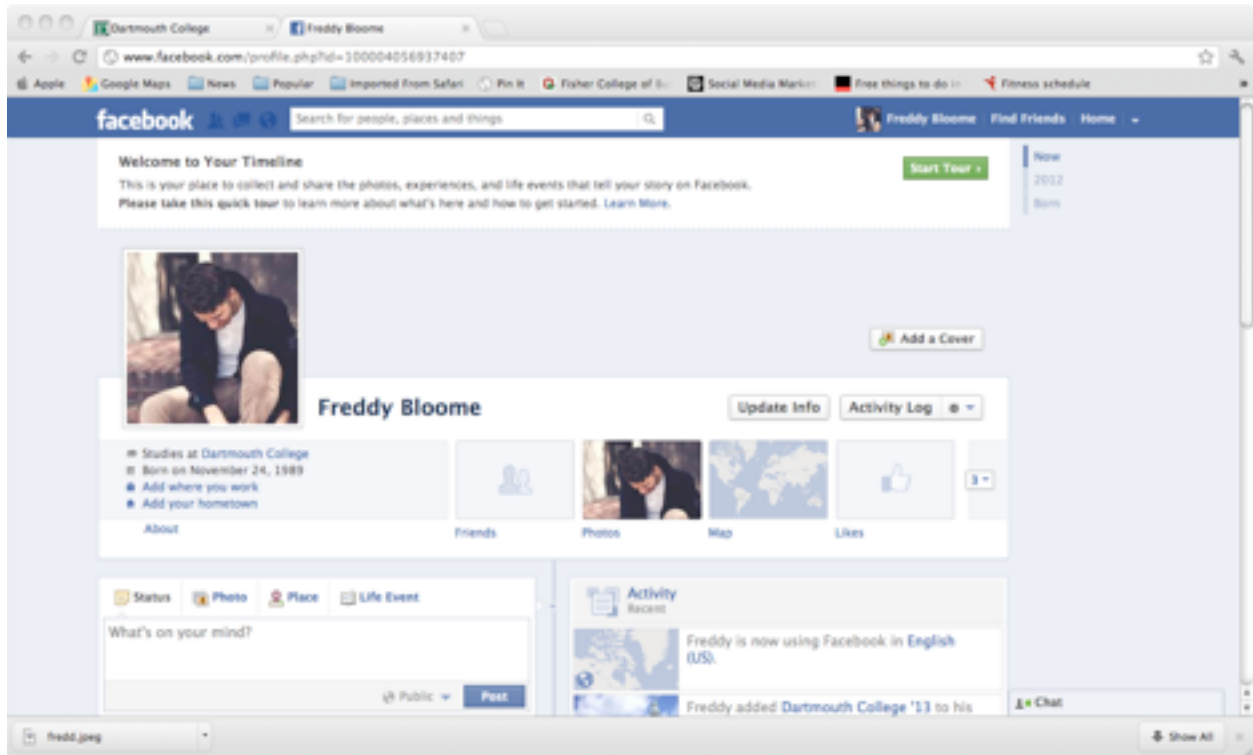
You were exhausted. Everyone today was complaining about something somewhere. The nouns were different but the sentiment was the same. At the hospital it was Obamacare, at the restaurant it was taxes on small business owners, on the phone with Freddy it was planning for the future – the future that you knew did not exist and yet still needed your son to predict his role in.

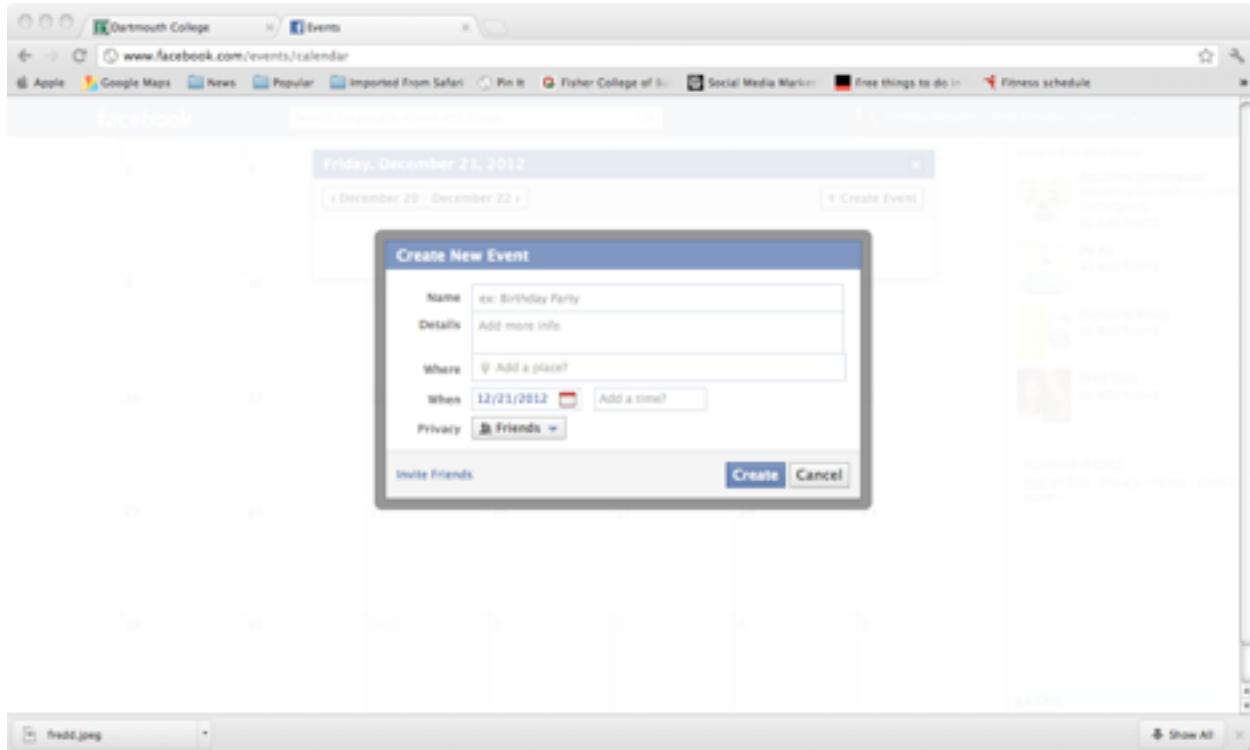
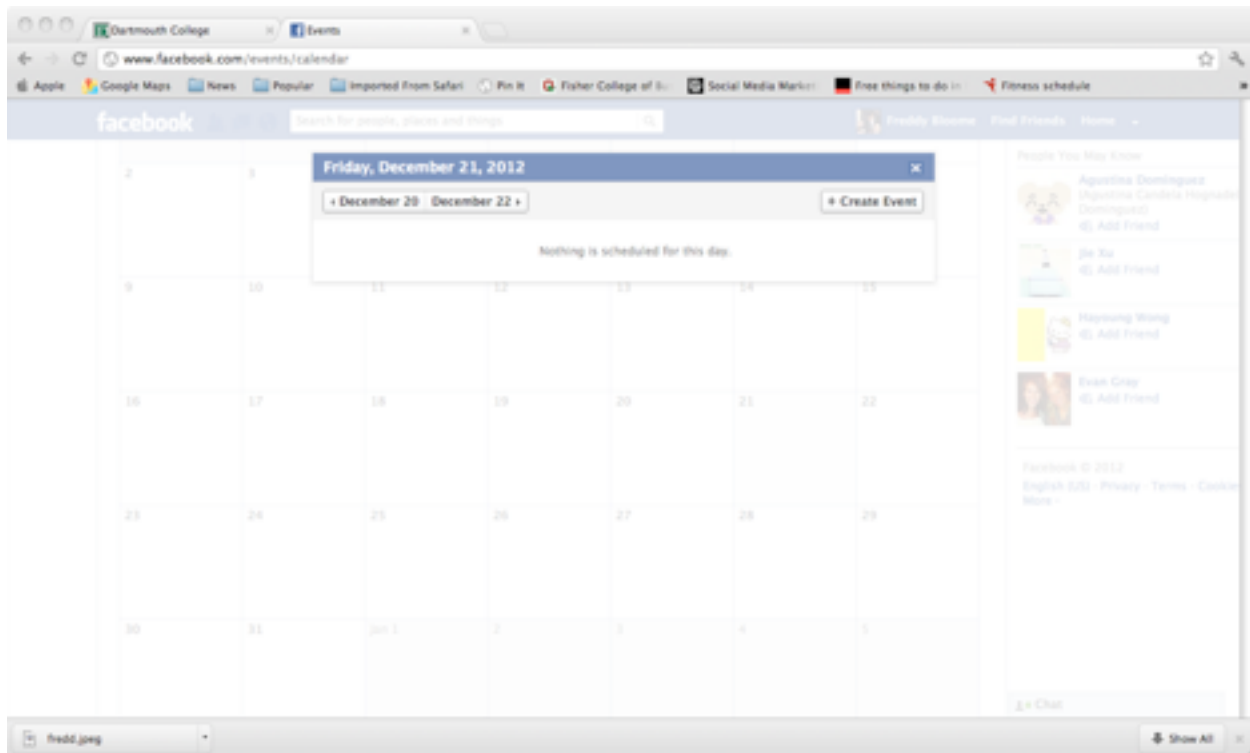
You tried to sit down, the first time today, but stood up again to help wheel your patient onto her bed and down the hallway into the post-op ward. You saw her family behind the automatic wooden doors, the ones with small criss-crossed glass windows waiting in the waiting room. You prepared yourself, “Here we go again.”

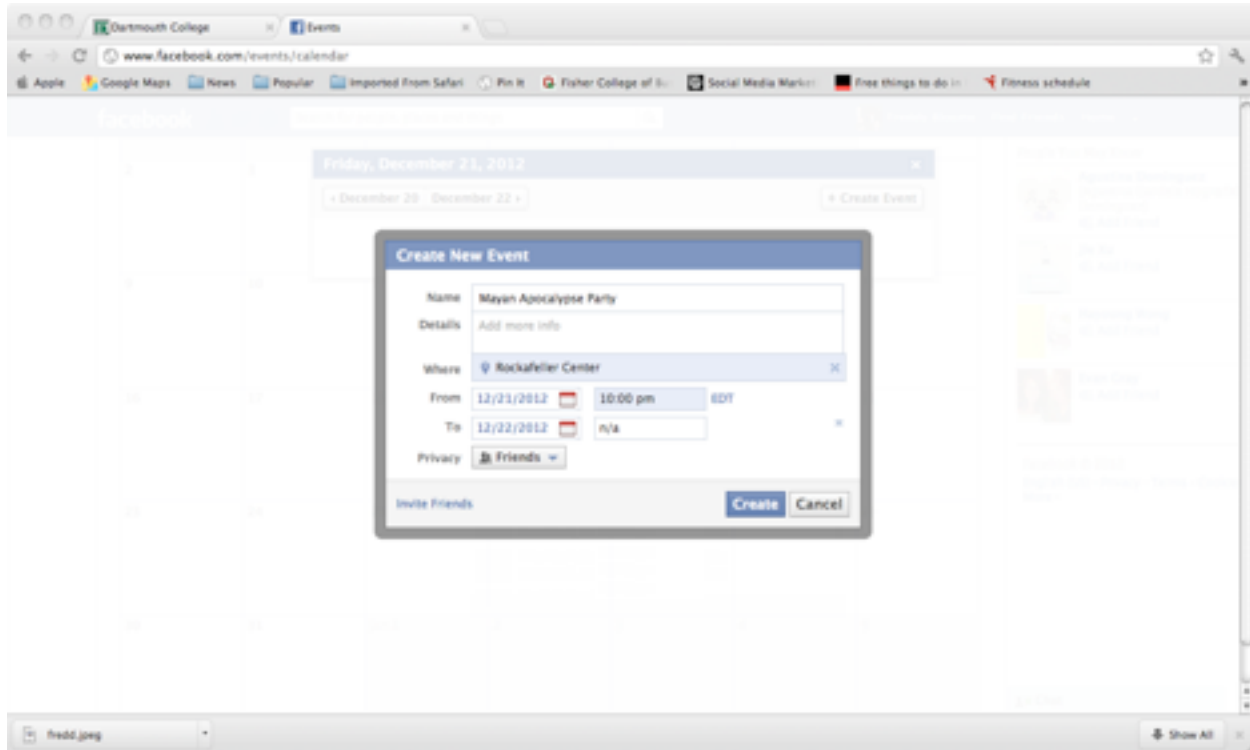
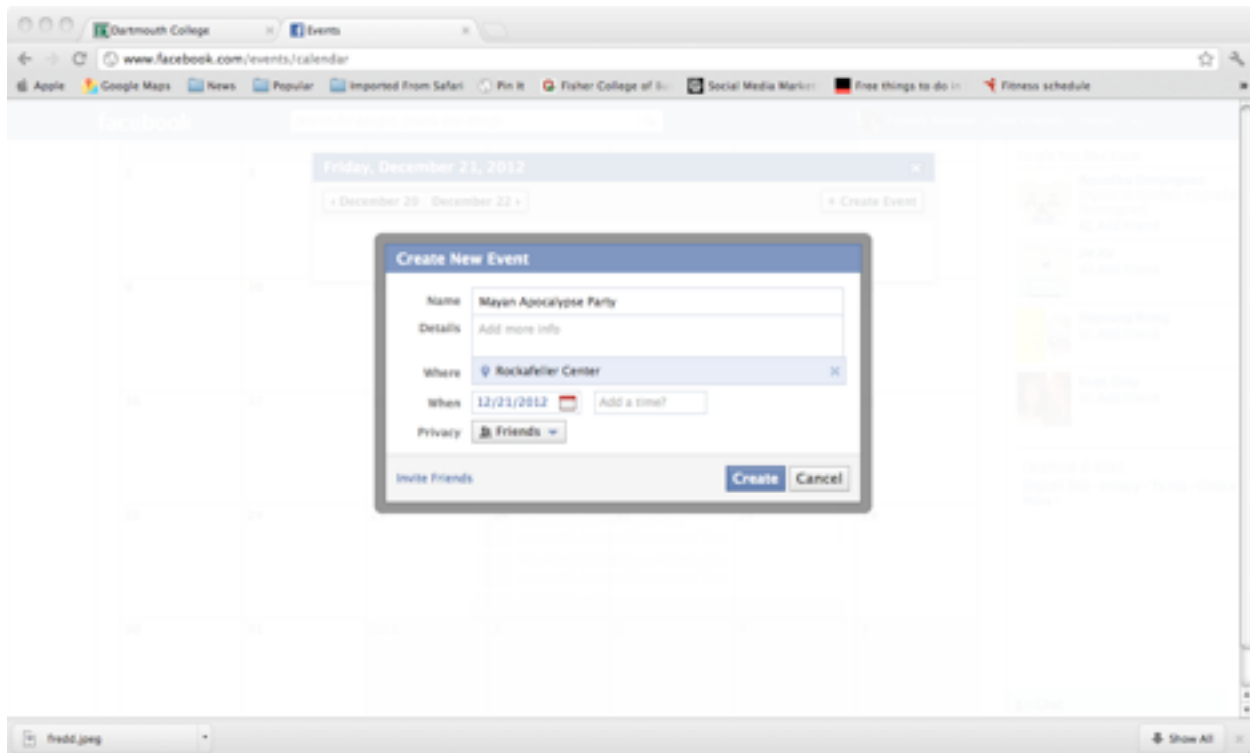
You took your own pulse. In, *The House of God*, a book written in the 60s about a resident's view of medicine, the main character says when someone goes into a Code the first thing you do is take your own pulse.

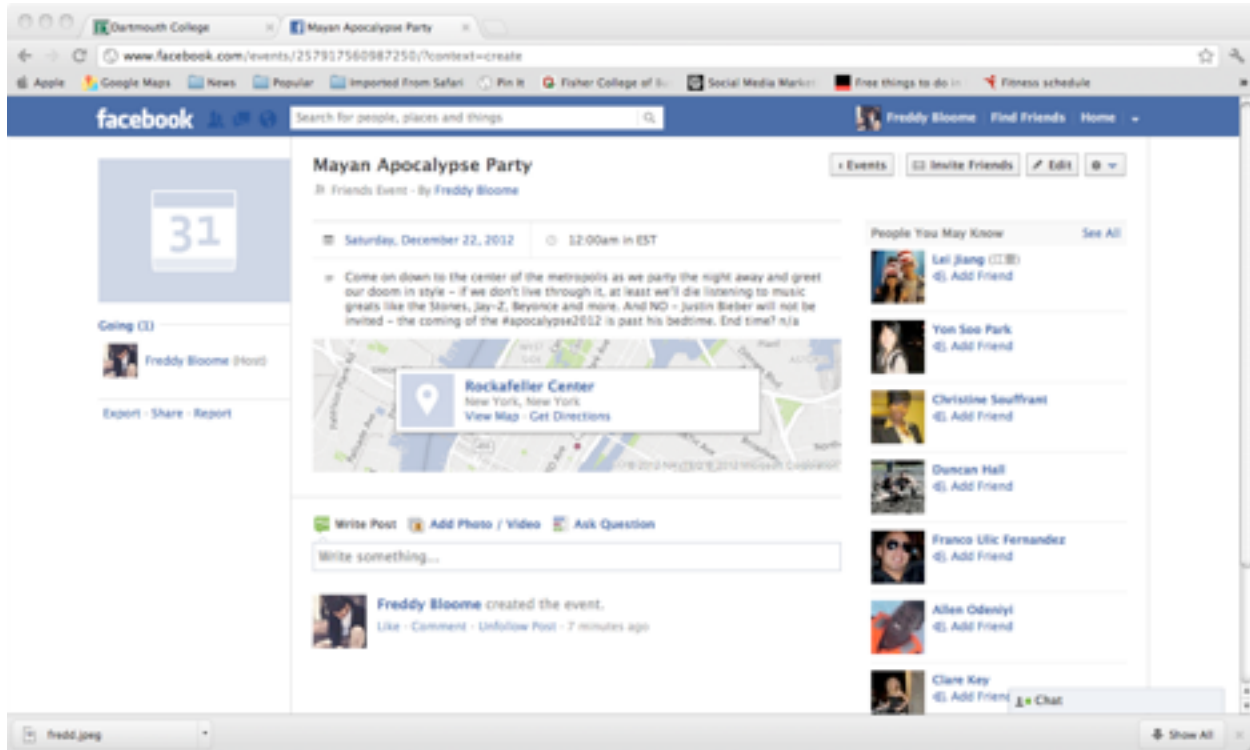
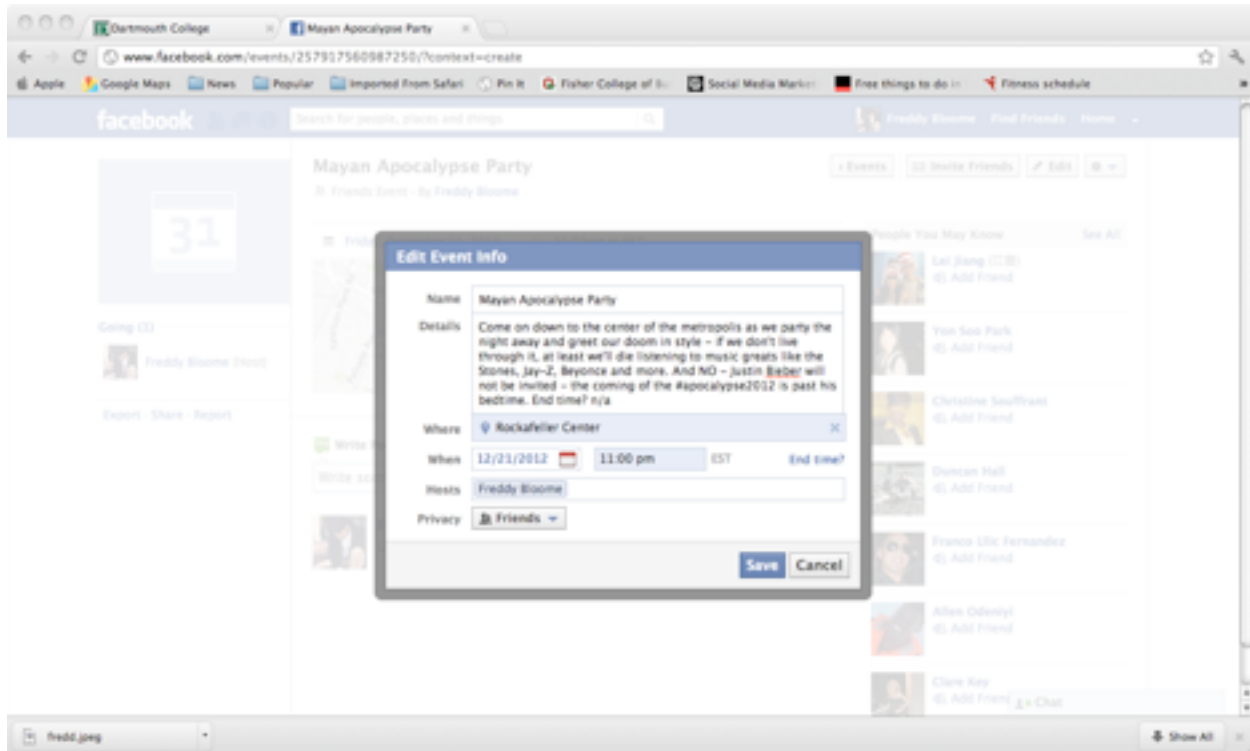
No one was dying, not yet, but today was far from over.

## Chapter 5 - Freddy









Mayan Apocalypse Party

Friends Event - By Freddy Bloome

Events Invite Friends Edit

31

Going (1)

Freddy Bloome (Host)

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Friends Event - By Freddy Bloome

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

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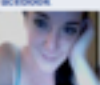
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

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## Mayan Apocalypse Party

Friends Event · By Freddy Bloome

Friday, December 21, 2012 11:00pm in EST

Come on down to the center of the metropolis as we party the night away and greet our doom in style - if we don't live through it, at least we'll die listening to music greats like the Stones, Jay-Z, Beyonce and more. And NO - Justin Bieber will not be invited - the coming of the #Apocalypse2012 is past his bedtime. End time? n/a

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Kenny Gould is going.

Freddy Bloome changed the time of the event to be Friday, December 21 at 11:00pm in EST.

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Freddy Bloome changed the time of the event to be Friday, December 21 at 11:00pm in EST.

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Name: Mayan Apocalypse Party

Details: Come on down to the center of the metropolis as we party the night away and greet our doom in style - if we don't live through it, at least we'll die listening to music greats like the Stones, Jay-Z, Beyonce and more. And NO - Justin Bieber will not be invited - the coming of the #Apocalypse2012 is past his bedtime. End time? n/a

Where: Rockefeller Center

When: 12/21/2012 11:00 pm EST End time?

Hosts: Freddy Bloome

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## Mayan Apocalypse Party

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**Edit Event Info**

**Name** Mayan Apocalypse Party

**Details** Come on down to the center of the metropolis as we party the night away and greet our doom in style - if we don't live through it, at least we'll die listening to music greats like the Stones, Jay-Z, Beyonce and more. And NO - Justin Bieber will not be invited - the coming of the #Apocalypse2012 is past his bedtime. End time? n/a

**Where** Brooklyn Bridge

**When** 12/21/2012 11:00 pm EDT End time?

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## Mayan Apocalypse Party

By Friends Event · By Freddie Bloome

Events | 22 Invite Friends | Edit

Friday, December 21, 2012 What time?

Come on down to the center of the metropolis as we party the night away and greet our doom in style - if we don't live through it, at least we'll die listening to music greats like the Stones, Jay-Z, Beyonce and more. And NO - Justin Bieber will not be invited - the coming of the #Apocalypse2012 is past his bedtime. End time? n/a

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## Chapter 6 - Silas, Afternoon

The bell rang. After sliding computers into backpacks and phones out of pockets, most of the eighth grade funneled themselves into the renovated cafeteria like cattle to slaughter. Not that you drew such a conclusion at the time, you were a participant. Your head was so deliriously preoccupied with her and the conversation you had with Cody before school that even something so natural to you as forming accurate metaphors for mass, mindless migrations was a struggle.

She had moved from somewhere south of you after the start of Trinity's fall semester. The yellow and orange leaves crunched under your new Nikes as you walked through the courtyard for a bit of fresh air before ninth period study hall. It would never be the same; every boy in class sat up straighter, many in an attempt to conceal the unfortunate reality of male teenage fantasies. There was just something different about her: smooth skin, freckles, hazel eyes, a twanginess to her a's. She smelled like a summer breeze.

#thataawkwardmomentwhen you meet someone and you suddenly have nothing to say

She walked through the hallways and people moved aside to watch her go past them. Maddie tossed her hair once and it brushed your lips on accident. It made you think of the times you used to push your face into the shag rug in the living room pretending it was a dog.

#thataawkwardmomentwhen you share something personal about yourself that you probably shouldn't have

And now, you only had three hours to get through before the day ended. Standing in the lunch line - on Fridays you bought instead of packed, to the chagrin of your mother – you mused about your winter break activities. Would it be skiing in the Alps like Matt? Or heading to Cancun like Cody? Nope. But you had been thinking of asking your mother to help out in the new restaurant's kitchen and learn to cook the menu. Maybe she would give you a summer job.

You were sliding your tray along the counter pausing to consider the day's offerings – chicken fries or pizza? Well, since pizza was technically a “vegetable” according to national health standards, you didn't have to choose and you could have both. You grabbed a chocolate milk and an apple – for good measure – and went to pay.

Your lunch total cost was \$3.79; what a bargain, you thought, as you picked up your tray and went to look for a place to sit. You were still thinking about the conversation you had with Justin this morning about Maddie wanting to ask you something. It was probably just his way of pranking you to “be a man and ask her out already, before someone else does!” Good thing you dodged that bullet before committing social suicide, he almost had you. You imagined what would happen – she would probably be mortified – if you were to ask her to go see “The Hobbit” with you. It had just opened last week.

Whatever. The cafeteria was a zoo as always. You looked for your normal table which had somehow vanished in the maelstrom of hungry middle schoolers. You just kind of stood there, daydreaming again about cookies, presents, sleeping-in. You closed your eyes and took a deep breath like you were inhaling your mother's cooking.

You opened your eyes and There. She. Was. Maddie was standing in front of you.

“Oh god, not now,” you thought.

“Hi Silas,” she said smiling. You could see a poppyseed between her canine and front tooth but you didn't have the heart to tell her.

You gulped because in about thirty seconds you were going to have a very hard problem – to deal with.

“Hey Maddie, what's up?”

“Do you want to come sit by me?”

What?! Of course you did, but you didn't want to seem over eager and especially now, as you were fidgeting with your tray, trying to position it at a good height for maximum concealment.

“Sure,” you said.

“Okay great!” she giggled and you followed her slim figure to her table. You were the only male in the sea of girl tables.

#thataawkwardmomentwhen the odds are in your favor, but you can't capitalize

You tried to concentrate on what she was asking and what she was saying to you but now you finally understood why your dad never actually heard anything your mom was saying – he wasn't just ignoring her. The pain was excruciating; not only were you blinded by how pretty she was, you had the urge to just make her stop talking just so you could look at her and not feel guilty for not paying one shred of attention to the words coming out of her perfectly shaped mouth, but more than that your balls were beginning to cramp up. You felt trapped, you needed to somehow escape but you didn't want to; finally – finally! - you and she were alone. Of course, not actually alone, but you had her attention and she had yours.

You watched her pick at the chocolate pudding cup her mom packed that morning in her brown bagged lunch complete with a hope-you're-having-a-great-day-sweetie-love-mom square of a purple Post-It. And you watched her smile shyly to one of her friends sitting across the table, Sheila. You didn't know Sheila very well, but in that instant you made it your life's goal to be on her good side, now that Sheila's opinion of you mattered more than anyone else's maybe even

more than Maddie's. You knew from experience, from all those years watching Katherine and her friends sprint the gamut of emotional and physical disorientation - more entertaining than the RealityTV shows Freddy was watching in the living room – that the guy, you in this case, needed the best friend's, Sheila's, approval before you could even think about getting on base with the girl, aka Maddie. You turned your attention back to her. Her eyes were as clear and bright as never before, her hair glimmering like a mermaid's in the artificial lighting of the cafeteria, a little smudge of dessert on her upper lip that you just wanted to lick off. Her mouth was moving again and you could have sworn it was better than *Blue Planet*, and it's damn hard to beat anything remotely associated with Morgan Freeman.

She looked at you and cocked her head to the side and you thought you were going to lose it right then and there. “Silas?” she asked.

“Yeah?”

“So...what do you think?”

“What..do..I..think?” Your words were slow as you tried to remember what she might have been saying between the time you ate the first delicious chicken fry with ketchup and when you started on your rectangle of doughy cheese pizza. You may or may not have finished your entire chocolate milk in that time, too, because the bottle was empty, but you couldn't remember how it got that way. You looked at her.

“Yeah, about letting me look at your science homework? Do you have it with you right now? You know, I just don't get it and it would be a *huuuuuuge* help if I could just look at your answers.”

“Wait, like copy them?”

“Well, silly,” she hit you on the wrist lightly, “I couldn't do that,” she scrunched her nose, “cheating is illegal.”

“Yeah it is.”

“So will you let me have your homework?”

Normally, any type of contact with Maddie would have had you feeling like a new man. But the things that used to make your pulse quicken and make you feel like the blood had just rushed from your head down into your feet, like her touching you or wiggling any extremity, nose included, seemed to immediately lose their luster. Was she really asking you to give her your work so she could just copy it? Wasn't she smart? Didn't she do well in science class? She knew more than you did, she got everything right, always, all the time, she was the teacher's favorite – she had taken your #1 spot but that had been okay since it was her and you didn't think you could



cede the position to anyone less worthy. Had it all been a lie? It was strange, she did seem to have the same ideas as Billy and Seth, your friends from the Razor Scooter Friends Club, but that was because she was more intelligent than they were, right? And she was the one helping them...right?

“Uhh...” you hesitated. “Do you want me to just help you with them?” Maybe she was just having trouble with the current topic, geology.

“No, no I just need the answers. It would take too long to actually *do* the stuff.”

“Oh.”

“Come on Silas! Pleeeeeeaseeee,” she was begging you and you started to unzip the big pocket of your red Jansport backpack.

“Thank God, thank God, you're a lifesaver Si I don't know how to thank you! Everyone else is on vacation already and I totally couldn't do this homework without a smartie like you!” Her voice was sweet, but the kind of man-made sweet, like Splenda-sweet or high-fructose-corn-syrup sweet. So, fake.

You felt yourself go limp. It wasn't fair. She was still looking at you and you wanted so badly to rewind the last thirteen seconds, the last thirteen years, and just start over, start again, forget any of that had happened. You were practically running to school this morning with the possibility of the day, of you and Maddie and the now. Now that dream was what it was - a dream.

You stopped mid-way from pulling out your science binder. You had a decision to make. Give Maddie the binder and establish the potential to hang out (or maybe because of the favor she'll like you enough in the future to go out with you, maybe, maybe on a pity date) or just say no, Maddie, that's cheating and do the right thing, the hard thing, the honorable thing. And risk your social status for the rest of your time at Trinity.

Your parents had just allowed you to start watching PG-13 movies a few months ago. The hero from your latest Netflix rental, *The Dark Knight*, was not Batman, but the Joker, in your opinion. It wasn't that the Joker wasn't evil, he was, he definitely was, but he stood for something and everyone knew what that was. You wondered if standing up for Evil took more bravery than pretending to not be good because you are afraid of what other people will say, or not say, about you.

“Um, sorry Maddie.” You said, not making eye contact.

“What?”

“I can't...?” you made it sort of a question.

“What do you mean.”

“Well, if I let you look at my homework, that's cheating. And I want to help you, but I can't just let you have my work.”

“What' the hell? I thought you were cool Silas.”

“What?” Her use of the word “cool” in the past tense was icy, you felt a chill.

“All I asked for was the answers to two homework problems, and you can't even give me those because you believe in not cheating or something?”

“Well...” you trailed off.

“I thought you liked me.”

You took a deep breath, “Not. Any-more,” you said. You picked up your backpack and tray and took Maddie's trash with yours and slid out from the lunch table.

It was the Joker. You knew he wouldn't have let someone else push him around, least of all a girl. Even if it was the prettiest girl in the lunch room, in the whole school, there would be more, you hoped. It wasn't about making a statement to the rest of the school (you had just solidified your status as a self-righteous geek who isn't cool enough to let you borrow his homework for the rest of the year). No, it was about making a statement to yourself.

After all, if you didn't hold yourself accountable – who would?

## Chapter 7 - Kate, Evening

Inigo was right, I should have opened that envelope.

It had just been sitting there mocking me.

<tweet from @kittykate>

I was afraid of rejection [#ThingsPeopleSayAfterABreakUp](#)

So I just let it sit there.

A couple of months ago I had it in my mind to send an article the Royal Society journal, *Proceedings A*.

### **Proceedings A**

[↑ Top](#)

*Proceedings of the Royal Society A* publishes the latest refereed research articles in the mathematical, physical and engineering sciences. All articles are of the highest scientific quality, with a particular emphasis on the new, emerging areas of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research. The journal also selects and publishes occasional reviews, which contain interesting, innovative or exciting new ideas. Its scope is vast and spans the broad breadth of physical sciences.

The article unveiled my darkest secret: string calculus.

I had been playing around with the idea since college and sharing it on Pinterest with my limited followers. I had my Board set up under a fake user at first, but I forgot the password and the password to the accompanying email address I had additionally created for the account. So I did it over, in my name. But, I wanted to wait until it was published, though, for some kind of external validation. I didn't know what form that would take either. I just knew it had to be something besides people "hearting" generic photos of fractals in nature.

It seemed my life was full of aliases.

I had been working on the theory – a combination of calculus and string theory – since the summer after my Junior year in college. It was essentially my senior thesis. Ohio State didn't make it a priority to check for logic, rationale, possibility or even merit of senior theses (if you were apt enough to file the paperwork, find an advisor, find your major advisor – or an equivalent - for a signature and be able to graduate on time - all navigating this solo – you were considered coherent and academically independent and thus capable of completing a university-sanctioned thesis.) So my grand, soul-baring, this-is-what-will-make-me-famous (as a mathematician and all time Queen of the Nerds) proposal slipped through the cracks of the higher-education state-school-overpopulation "standards" just like that. I was given 3 credits a quarter, for a total of 9 hours my senior year, to work on my project whenever I felt like it, which was always, and then defend it in front of three people: two from the math department, one from the John Glen School of Public Affairs. But really I didn't have to defend anything.

My unruly brown hair pulled tightly into a bun, Amish-length skirt and thick tortoiseshell glasses were enough to elicit substantial pity on my behalf (my lack of a life) from all three judges, thus paving the yellow-brick road of my thesis to be received at the Oz of Higher Minds. That is, with nods, in agreement, as symptom of sleep deprivation, and an attempt to stave off boredom on the part of the Public Affairs professor. I just kept talking during my presentation – the one for which I had been preparing for months. Eventually, the three professors had heard plenty of my soliloquizing and one of them asked me had I a pen? What self-proclaimed mathematician doesn't carry a pen and a piece of chalk on her at all times? (Also a copy of *A Brief History of Time*.) I had one nestled in the inside breast pocket of my new suit, bought just for the express occasion of presenting my thesis. I opened my jacket flashily to brandish my pen. Instead of tactfully presenting my mentor with his requested item, my hand was covered in a thick black ink stain which had seeped from my jacket pocket onto my dry-cleaned and starched white shirt, the cuffs and collar of which were beginning to chafe as I had buttoned every button and all-too crisply ironed each fold. Talk about the #apocalypse2012. Whether it was the mental trauma of attempting to explain the previously unexplainable - how the variables in the fundamental theorem of calculus, part one, may actually not be variables at all but placeholders for the undefined, or the slightly defined, or the almost completely potential with a positive probability around 97% - or whether it was the frank exhaustion from not sleeping for the four years of my undergraduate career, I began to cry. Actually to sob.

At the sight of the ink blob, now gathering strength and saturation like a coming thunderstorm, causing the total ruination of my clothes and imminent implosion of my reputation, the triad of judges quickly took out their own pens, signed and dated their evaluations, taking visible satisfaction at the manifestation of this minor crisis of geekdom. They scooted out of the room the penthouse of the Mathematics Building, trying to contain themselves from laughing out loud.

I used to think of that room, in better times, as actually being quite lovely, a retreat from the other science-y rooms on campus that were always windowless and illuminated by LED lighting. The Mathematics Building had recently been renovated and the top floor was turned into a lounge area for graduate students and faculty, though no one ever used it. There was office space, of course, cushioned chairs, a thin TV and plastic tables, a full kitchen and Coke machines. But that day, I couldn't stand to be there longer than absolutely necessary. A complete meltdown was already on the horizon; I just wanted to go home.

I ambled dejectedly to the elevators and pressed on the button for the ground floor. The building's secretary, Mrs. Thorpe noticed my pathetic state of affairs as I ambled off, dejected and clearly in need of a washing machine, club soda, a Tide2Go pen, and a large piece of chocolate.

“Sweetheart what happened?” she asked. We had been on excellent, friendly terms since my freshman year and were close by virtue of daily interaction. I always bought her Christmas gifts and Crimson Cup Large White Mochas, her favorite, from the cafe in the nearby Sciences and

Engineering Library, or SEL. (People called it the Squinty-Eye Library, but I never did because I used to think that even just saying those words, even if I didn't mean it to be derogatory, contributed to the mistreatment of our international students who worked twice as hard as any typical Buckeye and three times as hard as any fraternity brother. #sorryimnotsorry for getting worked up.)

“Oh Mrs. Thorpe!” I wailed, actually whaled; I was a blubbering mess.

I showed her the stain, “Oh!” she gasped with an inward sucking of air. “Oh dearie me, you had better come in here and take that shirt off right now, we need to get it into some water! How close do you live to here?”

“Not close,” I said flatly, “over by the med center.”

“No, no, no, that won't do! I won't have you ruining that perfectly decent shirt of yours and suit jacket – what a beauty! Is it new?”

“It was.”

“Come inside Kate,” she said as she beckoned me further into the administrative offices of the mathematics department. “Here,” she pointed to the faculty bathroom, “go in there – don't worry I'll make sure no one walks in – and start putting that shirt under some water. I'll rustle up a shirt from the lost and found for you.” She pointed at me like I was the stain. “Go!” she pushed me through the swinging, faux wooden door.

<tweet from @kittykate>

And that was that [#ThingsPeopleSayAfterABreakUp](#)

After graduation I headed to England to “get away.” I needed to get out of The Bubble. Ohio and the United States in general had become the epicenter of audacious people, things, dogs, materials, baristas, students, and obsessions. And I felt like I needed a breath of air, preferably fresh, but even if it had the taste of beer and cigarette smoke on it, I knew it was better than the heavily Lysol-ed, air I was consuming in Columbus and certainly in New York. Why my parents thought it was a good idea to raise a family in that city I'll never know. It isn't that I didn't like growing up in New York, in fact, I loved it and that city will always be very dear to me. It was just a difficult lifestyle to fit into, especially if you are like me. The museums, I called my vacation homes, Columbia – my own desert oasis. Famous restaurants, theaters, stores, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the HighLine, Meatpacking, the Village - it's all been iconized by generations of oglers, immigrants and bumpkins. (Does anyone use that word anymore?) The only things that aren't outwardly touristy are Starbucks establishments (because they are everywhere) and Tribeca (because it's Tribeca), but even now as downtown continues to rebuild post 9-11, the rebellious mentality is becoming more and more of a hollow cliché. I know we all want to visit the Trade

Center memorial but what about those of us who were actually there? Who didn't have the Trade Centers as the emblem of downtown anymore? Who had to live with the emptiness? No one really talks about us, or gives us credit for carrying on, us - the living. We only build monuments to the dead.

<tweet from @kittykate>

But I guess we all need something to hold on to. [#ThingsPeopleSayAfterABreakUp](#)

The letter from the Royal Society was white and thin and addressed to a *Miss Katherine Bloome*. To whom? It was silly to think that I could have sent in a paper unblessed by Oxford University and it would be noticed by the best of the scientific elite. I hadn't wanted Oxford's name. I had to prove I could do it by my own merit, and get it in (that's-what-she-said) a prestigious, if not the most prestigious, academic journal in the UK. Many more intelligent people than I have tried for years to get their own work published by the RS. I don't know what I was smoking.

I should have had that Oxford blue seal, the letterhead, announce that I wasn't just another mad scientist, manic vagabond thinking (s)he had all the answers to the great mysteries. Or a solution, maybe, a way of understanding nature. Maybe finally quantifying religion, finding patterns and outcomes in the spiritual, the metaphysical, realm.

I should have played the game. Isn't this how everything happens today? "It isn't what you know, it's who you know," right? I remember my college advisor saying that to me over and over again repeating it until it became a mantra. I may have had a decent mind, good grades, countless service hours and had altogether leveraged my time on campus well enough that applying to graduate school should have been the cowgirl type of fun, she made me feel as though I was, in fact, not even qualified. In her opinion, I didn't even deserve to consider applying to a school if I hadn't made any faculty connections or knew someone who knew someone who knew someone in their Admissions Department. It was a terrifying feeling. Even after getting accepted to my reach schools, I was afraid they had made a mistake, that any day I would get the real email rejecting me and saying there had been a glitch in the system, that everyone who was accepted got the wrong email. My advisor, a poor judge of character, was a woman who should have been doing anything else. And because she treated me with such acute disdain, I did the same to her, turning an entire class of undergraduates against her, filling the mathlete gossip channels with false horror stories about students under her watch, who didn't get the classes they wanted and ended up switching majors because they couldn't finish in four years due to her inability to schedule classes punctiliously. *Tempest fugit*. It was entertaining, for a time. Then I felt badly for her, there were bigger things going on in the world than shoddy advising, my low self-esteem and mathletes uniting to get someone's mother fired. But it wasn't the end of the world though, not the #apocalypse2012. It wasn't as if the higher-ups were going to fire her over her personality. No, that would be an HR nightmare, something Ohio State did not need to deal with. We were concurrently dealing with an athletic crisis. Apparently some football jocks had sold their championship rings for tattoos, and Coach Tressel had known but denied the allegations and then the NCAA got involved and then it came out that he did know and we were sanctioned, etc

etc, etc. I wasn't really paying attention when the media hailstorm hit. What did that matter? There was a war going on in Iraq, for heaven's sake, and revolution in Egypt. But vanity obstructed my view of truth. And for that I'll take this opportunity to apologize.

<tweet from @kittykate>

She treated me like s\*\*\* but I learned a valuable lesson [#ThingsPeopleSayAfterABreakUp](#)

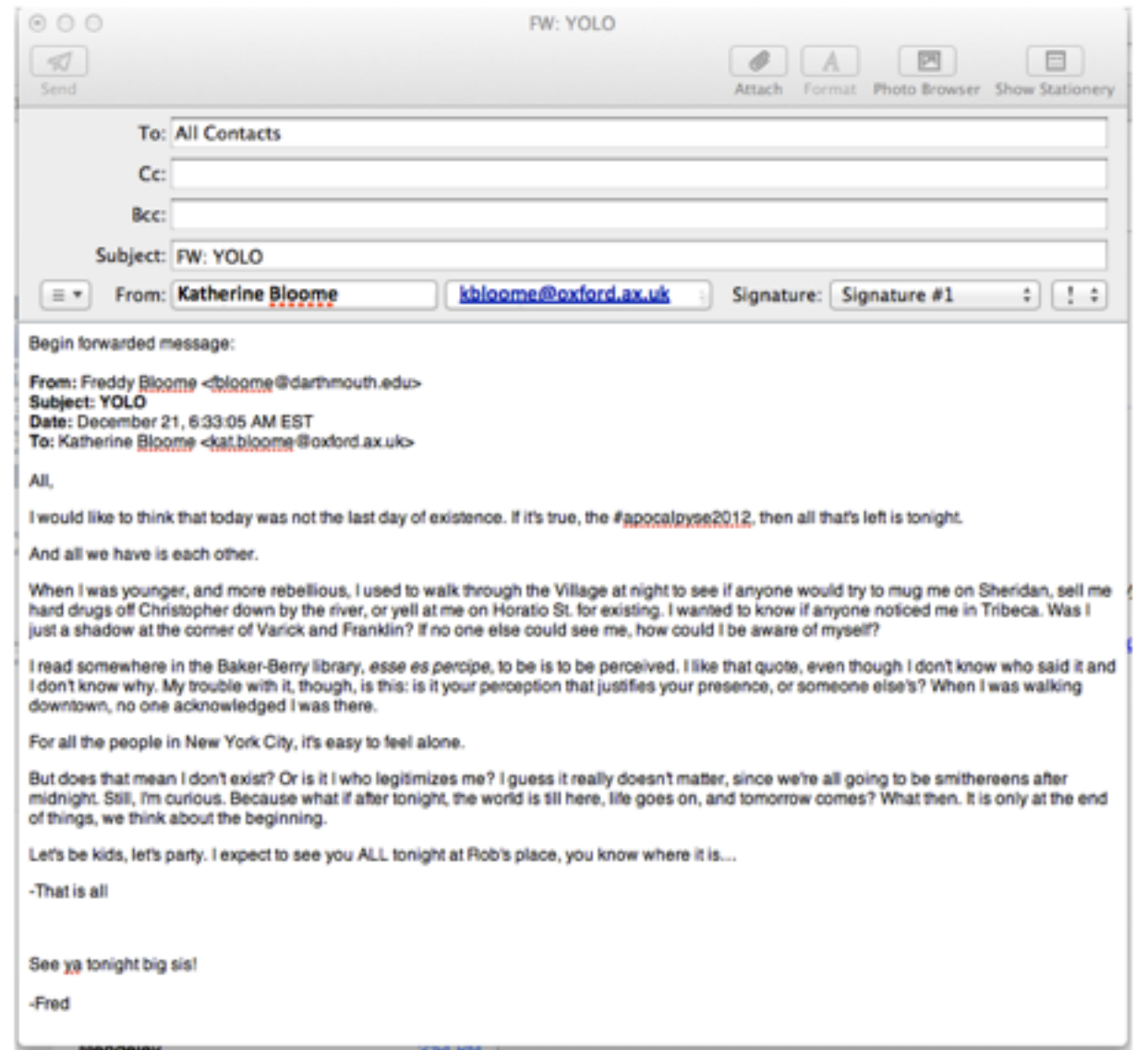
All I could think about yesterday on the plane was that letter. Even when we left and I brushed Inigo off about the letter resting in its designated “In-Mail” wicker basket, right next to its “Out-Mail” counterpart. And I thought about it when we got on the plane and he asked me again if I had submitted something to the Royal Society, then when Mom asked about my research and as I was dancing to the music at Freddy's party, last night, to some wild dub-step funk I was too drunk to complain about, all I could think about was the letter.

Why hadn't I opened it?

<tweet from @kittykate>

QED? We'll never know. [#ThingsPeopleSayAfterABreakUp](#)

## Chapter 8 - Freddy, Morning





## Chapter 9 - Rosemary, Afternoon

Standing alone in the kitchen, its clean metropolitan lines of steel, copper, and worn brick intrigued you like a blank canvas in an artist's studio. Waiting. Food is not the subject of your compositions, but is itself the work of art. In dirty, misshapen vegetables from Brooklyn's Red Hook Community Garden you see character, shadow and depth. Golden and Red Delicious apples from upstate inspire sin. Next, you walk to the window of the walk-in freezer, admiring the outlines of lush, hanging meat. Just look at that lamb. Feminism be damned: a good rack, is a good rack. (If only your college self heard you now... You used to rally against comments like that. On proper Wellesley ground with signs and a makeshift bullhorn you urged the "crowds" to respect the sex. Oh you were good in a bob and cutoff jean shorts, a ratty tank-top, Gertrude Stein in one hand and a Bible in the other. Sometimes you were rooting for all and the above, arguing the two ideologies need not be exclusive. Did you actually believe it? Not really, but that's politics baby. God, it seemed like forever ago your soapbox days were replaced by apathetic nights foggy and heavy with mollie and disappointment. (It was a phase, a long one. And it took a while, but you came back.)

You came back to yourself in a kitchen like this one. Everyone in the apartment needed money desperately and you were picking up just about any work that didn't require a drug test and ended in cold cash...just about. The others weren't as judicial. Both sous chefs at *Smee* had called in sick that day, both of them! It was unheard of...the restaurant's owner and main cook was desperate. Rosemary the Dishwasher. Can you cook? He asked, his eyes willing you to answer Yes. Even though you couldn't. You learned quickly and the pace of the service, the chopping and slicing and sizzling, the sounds of the diners reignited the fire that was nearly exhausted after months of no heat and less food.

It seemed like ages ago. Graham came into the picture and complicated things for a while, and then you figured a lot out. You can't say you know much more now than you did when you first came to New York, but you never looked back. Avelino+Bloome opened over a year ago. Over a year ago. The front of the house was full of friends and fans of your cooking. How on Earth did you get here? You leaned into the same corner now as then, looking out at the same kitchen, with the same hands on the same hips. The light coming through made the imperfections appear greater than they were. The caress of time that has passed; the tile on the kitchen floor is scuffed and there are knife marks on all the cutting boards; your hips are a little more Italian. No one faults you for that. You still make your own espresso, if luck.

The restaurant opens at noon and closes at midnight on weekdays and 2 am on week-ends. The staff comes in around 9 or 9:30, but you're going by 7:15 in the morning. Silas gets fed and takes the subway to school, sometimes you take it with him to Union Square for the open-air market groceries. You don't have to, but you do it anyway. It's the only time you have to yourself, without the kids or husband or the other distractions of your age.

That's normal right? After all, to feel like you need time away from those you love the most...Being a mother, your sense of identity has been bleached out by the hundredth load of whites, scrubbed away with dish soap and replaced by a tediously sterilized surface. And now, what is left? You cling to the occasional few hours in the morning when you shop surrounded by people – city tourists, students, strangers, farmers – to just be Rosemary Avelino again, not Mrs. Bloome or Mom or Wife or Neighbor. There must be something to look forward to, a time when pieces of your soul are returned to you unexpectedly. Retirement? You scoffed at the thought.

Sometimes you think you could be a writer. And you could be. For it is less the charge of a writer to write *well*, than to write at all. That is what I believe. Most people have the relative skills but not the passion, you see. If there is anything you have learned from your years as a chef, it is that nothing truly tastes, has a taste, unless it is empowered to. Alas, you'd much rather be right where you are, in the kitchen, laughing and concentrating, tasting and adding and no taking away. You have learned to live alongside mistakes: in cooking, you find a way to correct them, love them. Maybe you add a little more stock or a little more salt. And other times, you invent an entirely new dish. The trick is to never let anyone know. Life takes the winding road, Stevie Nicks knew that, and if you can find a way to make your messes or slip-ups your greatest achievements, then that will allow you to be as water, beholden to none, nourishing. Yes.

You had better try and contain that Italian temper. Nahhhh – never right? Why would you, it's much too, how to say this being modest, much too, well much too sexy to ever ever let go. No, your temper is as much a part of you as the ground is below your feet.

That simple morning ritual – which was, in fact only a mistake that became tradition – happens to be one of those re-humanizing acts; just thinking about it you felt energized.

You looked over at the door Brad, your sous chef from Providence, RI – your saving grace – was just walking in.

“Morning Mama,” he said to you with a nod, “What's on the docket today?”

Oh Brad, what would you do without him? Occasionally, he seemed to attend to your needs better than Graham...Just the way he handled basil, so gently, intimately even. It was sexy. He was an artist, and an artist in his own right: a graduate of RISD in photography and sculpture. You looked at his blond hair and greenish eyes. Damn, to be young again...You called him in this morning, early. You were running “late” again from home and wouldn't make it to the store before the rush of nannies and interns making runs for their employers. The resulting lines at Whole Foods were absurd. So could he please be your white knight? Sweep you away to middle aged bliss? You needed someone to watch the place, mainly to keep an eye on Macie, the new girl. And he doesn't mind coming in earlier on a Friday morning, his hangover is not nearly as bad as yours. Not to mention, you've seen the way he looks at Macie – the boy can't keep his eyes away – so you know he is always looking for any excuse to come in before the normal time.

You can't decide if you like her or not. It's a shame she needs this job so much, she should be designing custom lingerie – one of her many ambitions (she wrote it on her application) – for the rich and famous of New York City. Honestly, it sounds kinky, but it's a great idea. Did you know, well you didn't before but you know what I mean, that there is no retailer in NYC that solely designs custom lingerie – think of the monopoly you would have! The girl might have a dirty mind – but who doesn't? And you asked to see some of her sketches, Graham's birthday is coming up, maybe you could be her first client? Oh naughty!

This morning, after you made love, you looked at yourself longing for the body you once had. Getting out of the shower you shuddered at the extra folds of skin clinging to you like unfloured dough on a rolling pin.

You shook your head and tried to concentrate on beginning the day. You've been wasting all this time letting your mind wander – and yet, isn't that what being a chef is all about? Living in the moment, or in the present perhaps, if all moments are at some point – the present.

Okay, Rosemary, enough day-dreaming. Cooking. Thank God you don't have service in the back, you focus without thinking about emails, texts or other distracting messages. You can just do what you love, isn't that nice?

## Chapter 10 - Silas, Evening

“Hey Dad?” Silas asked me.

“Yes?”

“Dad, did you ever think that someone was...well, did you...” He stopped, the kid looked confused as hell. “Let me start over,” he said.

“That's fine.”

“Okay, did you ever find out that someone wasn't who they were? That they were just pretending?”

“I think so, Si, but I'm not quite following. Care to elaborate?”

My son let out that characteristic sigh of defeat, the sigh that all men fear, the sigh caused by women. He must have had a tough day, poor man. It's all part of growing up.

“What's on your mind kiddo?”

“Ah, I can't tell you,” he buried his curls in his left hand, his thinking hand.

“Silas, you know you can tell me anything,” I said, silently cringing inside – there were things I would definitely prefer not to know about my son, like how often he masturbated and drank alcohol or smoked weed, if ever. I left those things to my wife, Rosemary, she's the good cop.

“No. I. Can't” he whispered through gritted teeth, motioning with his eyes and craning his neck towards my daughter, Katherine, perched on the edge of the couch talking with Ricardo or Jicama or whatever this Spaniard's name was who had stolen my little girl, her rational lines of thinking to boot. The wine from dinner was kicking in. I wished Kate would act like a normal human being, it was strange to see her looking at another man like she used to look at me – with respect.

“Oh, okay,” I nodded in agreement. “Want to see what's up with mom in the kitchen?”

“Um..no?” he looked confused. I laughed.

“What's so funny over there?” Kate asked. Hah, I thought, I've still got her attention. Dad: one. Strange *chico* in my home for the holidays: zee-row. I mentally fist pumped the air.

“Nothing,” I decided to be nice, “I'm going in to the kitchen to check on your mother, do you or...um...uh, do either of you need anything?” Shit. What was his name?

Katherine shook her head, no. “No thank you, Dr. Bloome,” Inigo replied politely, “I think Kate and I are going to head out soon anyways.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, you know, for Fred's concert thing,” Katherine chimed. “I told him we'd go, it sounds fun.”

“It sounds like it's going to be some party, huh?” I said.

“Si, or uh, yes sir, but mostly we just want to be there for Freddy,” he said, drawing out his ess's. He sounded like a serpent. I made a mental note.

Actually though, I had to give the man some credit. Not only did he travel across the Atlantic to be with my daughter and her family for Christmas, a feat in itself let me tell you, his style was impeccable, his goatee manicured better than my Type-A neighbor's rooftop garden (complete with a solar-powered greenhouse). It was no wonder Kate liked him so much. I almost asked what shampoo he used, then realized if he answered with an “I don't know” or “Herbal Essences,” and Katherine smirked, even just a little, I would know for a fact the two of them were living together. Such details, which are truly just vagaries, are on a need to know basis, and I just don't have any desire to know. Now. If they were planning on getting married or if Kate were pregnant, heaven forbid if that were true I would welcome the #apocalypse2012, then I would want to know so I could sell the house. And my car. And maybe Silas' Nintendo.

Speaking of the house, we have so much stuff, we'd do well to try to condense our life into a couple hundred boxes. The kitchen is the only place in the house where everything in it is actually used on a regular basis. There she was, Rosemary, just as I had left her twenty minutes ago – washing dishes. I don't think I've ever asked her truthfully if she liked doing the dishes, if it was her “me time” that women like to have, or if she just did them because no one else would, or because no one else offered. I guess I knew the true answer and wanted to ignore it.

We weren't the type of parents who made chore lists for our kids, enacting a ban on all types of tangible to-do lists when we got married. But thank God for the iPhone, otherwise I wouldn't have a clue as to where I am supposed to be and when. Siri reminds me, she's better than my wife, but I would never admit it. Well, I think I did once actually, but only to the OR techs.

There she was, again, standing and shifting her weight from one foot to the other on the GelPro mat I had gotten her as an early Christmas present. She had been eyeing it for months, shuffling through those annoying Sunday paper inserts and saving the Bed, Bath & Beyond one so she could flip through the pages and pause obnoxiously at the pictures of things she wanted. They weren't many, but I wish she would have just come out and asked me instead of expecting me to do all the guesswork. Truly though, Rosemary spent a lot of time in our kitchen, it was what she

said she had always wanted to do. And look at us now, a doctor and a chef. If someone had told me that dreams do come true, I wouldn't have believed them. And I still wouldn't.

Of course, nothing ever happens the way you expect it to. The election this past year nearly bankrupted the country, no one saw that coming. Or maybe they did, but I didn't. Freddy stayed up in Hanover this summer working for the Dartmouth Outing Club while Kate flew to England to move in before graduate school. That the two of them would ever be separated used to be as impossible as Rosemary and I opening our very own restaurant. Done and done. I could be in a fucking Nike commercial, though I've got to hit the bag a few times before I could get them to consider me as their first over 50 model. Not impossible!

I looked at my wife scrubbing away at our chinaware.

“And what did you come in here for? Not to help me with the dishes, hm?”

“Funny. Can't a man come into his own kitchen without a reason?”

“Can't a woman choose to not have a child without a reason?”

“Whaaa...?” I was cornered, “that isn't even the same thing.”

She was laughing, “merely making a point. Now, what do you want? Something to eat? Drink?”

“Umm...yeah do we have any of your cheesecake left?”

“How many pieces did you have already?”

“Just one,” I lied.

“That's a lie,” she said, “but here, what the hell, tonight might be the last night we get to eat cheesecake.”

“Or have sex.”

“Same thing.”

I gasped, “ah! Take that back!”

“Never,” she smiled, “now watch this.” Rosemary took out a pristine pumpkin cheesecake with oreo-graham-cracker crust (my favorite). I could feel the chill of the open refrigerator. She sliced two pieces and added two sprigs of mint leaves, drizzling her dulce de leche brandy glaze over mine.

“Oh my god,” I said, “can I tweet about this?”

“Whatever you want. Tonight we're on the #apocalypse2012 diet.”

“Oh my god, you are brilliant, that's exactly what I'm tweeting.”

<tweet from “Graham Bloome” @WantS'more>  
Tonight we're on the #apocalypse2012 diet #YOLO

Silas came in the exact moment I was about to absolutely try and seduce my wife. She's much better at it than I am, but I wanted to give it a shot. You only live once, right?

“Dad? Are you in here?”

“Uh...you bet.”

“We'll finish this later” Rosemary mouthed to me.

I had to calm myself down, “yeah Si, we're just having some cheesecake.”

“Want some?” Rosemary asked.

“Oh yes! Yes please mom, you're the best.”

“So I've been told,” she said. “How was school today?”

“Ughhh,” I heard my son groan again. “Awful.”

“That bad?” Rosemary looked concerned. “So what's her name?”

“Maddie Greyson.”

“Oh, my boy,” she wrapped her arms around Silas, “girls are bitches! Don't do it to yourself!”

“No kidding...God, you're so cool, Mom” he looked surprised, “wait, how did you know?”

“I talk to your friends in AIM.”

“No joke?” Silas was clearly mortified.

Rosemary was straight faced, impressively so. I loved watching the way Rosemary talked to our kids, she was so much better at parenting than I was. It was like she already knew the end of the conversation before it began and she could work backwards and say all the right things at the

right times, make all the right jokes, the perfect witty comments that only she would understand and that I could follow only occasionally. (I can only think in one direction, unless I'm operating, sort of a tunnel-vision effect. Years in surgery have taught me to never try and predict the future, the outcome of a case because inevitably it will be the opposite.) At least I was a fun dad, I knew I didn't stink, according to the other side-lined parents at our kids' sporting events.

"You're joking. Please say you're joking...Mom?" Silas said, his face had suddenly gone pale.

Rosemary gave him her signature eyebrow raise, pursed lips in a half smile, the kind you never know for a fact is a real smile or a don't-mess-with-me-right-now-or-I'll-smite-you smile. "What do you think Si?" she asked.

He laughed, "okay, okay, you're just so convincing!"

"She should be on Broadway, I keep telling her."

"Yeah mom! How come you aren't doing that any more?"

"Oh, you know, lots of reasons."

"Such as?" Silas pressed, he was as much like me as he was like his mother.

"Such as you don't need to know, kiddo."

"Uh, fine." He said, "But when you regret not going to that open casting call, don't come crying to me!"

"It's a deal." Rosemary replied, "now what about this Maddie? Am I going to have to call her mother?"

"No, oh my god, please, please don't do that!" Silas quickly put down that idea like it was the Algerian revolution.

"Alright, jeez, relax Si."

"Tell us what happened, I promise we're out of earshot of Mr. and Mrs. out there in the living room." I said.

"Okay," Silas took a breath, "So. There's this girl."

If I had a dollar for every story that started or even ended that way, I could retire right now and still be able to afford Medicare Part D.



Rosemary and I exchanged looks, “Classic,” she said, “continue.”

“Maddie.”

“Yes, we know.” Rosemary agreed, nodding.

“Mom, could you stop interrupting me?” Silas pleaded.

“Let the man talk!” I said, “he's had a rough day.”

“Thanks Dad. So *anyways* Maddie...oh wait, I'll show her to you. Mom, you might actually recognize her from the winter concert, she plays the cello.”

“I was there too,” I protested. And was ignored.

“Oh was she the pretty one with the black bow in her hair I asked you about?”

“Yep, that's her.”

“I knew there was something between you two, I saw the way you looked at her during rests, you almost missed your pickup a couple of times.”

“Hey, hey weren't you supposed to be listening to the music?” Silas asked.

“That's a misconception, Silas,” Rosemary reported, “have you ever heard of someone going to listen to the music at their middle schooler's concert? Even if it is at Trinity...”

“Well, I guess not.”

“It's because we go not to hear, but to see our children, which fills us with an immense amount of pride and pleasure,” here she pinched his cheek, “Also the music is just not very good.”

“Is that true?” Silas looked to me.

“Um, well, I'm not sure. I'm usually in the back filming,” (I was appointed Class Historian, unaware I was even in the pool of applicants, by the PTA Board or “Father Time.” My duties included taking pictures at 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation and filming “important” sporting and musical events.) “So I don't concentrate on much, other than making sure I get a close-up shot of everyone's kid.”

“Whatev. Here she is,” Silas said, grimacing. He held up his iPhone and showed us Maddie's Facebook.



“She's the one on the left?” Rosemary said.

“Yeahh.”

“What happened?” I asked.

“Where to begin?” Silas moaned.

“At the beginning of course,” Rosemary suggested, “indulge us! I love hearing stories about riddled with unrequited love and teenage angst.”

“Mah-ahm,” Si rolled his eyes, “don't trivialize this one, okay? I'm sure I'll laugh about it when I'm your age and all, but the wound is still kinda fresh, you know? I really thought she was something else, something better than good.”

“I'm sorry Silas, I didn't mean to make you feel like I was making fun of you. I was just trying to make you feel better.”

“I know, just not right now, I feel like wallowing in self-pity for the moment.”

“I completely understand. We're Italian, wallow away.”

“So, tell us, what happened today at school son?”

## Chapter 11

Sometimes I feel like I've done all this before.

And truthfully, I have. For twenty-nine years I've been washing my family's dishes, not discontentedly, but it gets lonely sometimes. And that said, too, it is the time of day where I can pour myself a glass of wine, put on some music, and unwind. Tonight, though, I wish I could be in the living room with Katherine and the new guy, Inigo, Freddy and Silas – because at least the kid-adults, everyone but me, Graham and Silas, will be making their way into the city tonight for Freddy's #apocolypseparty. It's on the Brooklyn Bridge, boy, and I would have been there if I was just a little younger yes I would. But there comes a time where risking your own life used to be unimportant because you weren't really thinking about anyone but yourself, you were just selfish but now, with the kids and the love of my life, I couldn't possibly put myself in harms way – what if something happened? I'm not a scaredy-cat, I just don't want to think about what would happen if I wasn't around to see my children grow up. And with the way Katherine looks at her Spaniard, and the way he looks at her, I can tell I'll be having to log a lot more hours in at the restaurant to pay for the wedding. But I don't want to get ahead of myself, or them, you just know. Of course. Everyone knows. Katherine isn't anything like me, she wears her feelings whether she wants to or not. She isn't like her father either, no, I don't know where that trait came from.

When I picked them up from the airport, I went to park the car and walk in and meet Katherine so I could help her with her bags but sure enough she called and said someone was helping her. Naturally, I'm thinking someone is going to rob her but recently, I know – Rose baby, you're a little late to the party – recently, I've realized that kids need to make their own way, their own experiences, and part of that is tasting bitterness and understanding what I've been trying to protect them from their entire lives – harm. No one wants to see their daughter or son unhappy or hurt or worse, apathetic, but I know that Katherine especially needs her space, she can make her own decisions. So I didn't park the car instead I idled and inched along the road through international arrivals – so slowly I had to shut the heat off I was sucking in so much exhaust – and finally after three round trips and a nasty rap on the window followed by a “move along” from the officer on duty – I swear, unhappy people they must be, oh best sip of wine right there – I got a call from Kate saying that she was waiting at the end of the terminal for me.

Driving up, they're holding hands. I immediately thought she was pregnant so I squinted my eyes to see if I could see a bump or anything – the “glow,” enlarged breasts, chubby cheeks, crying – and couldn't discern anything right away – put it's still a topic of discussion. Then I was angry, because I hadn't made enough food (even though although I always do, I always expect at least one more person over to the house for dinner on a given night) and frustrated that this guy clearly seemed important to her which she had failed failed failed to mention all the times we facetedimed or skyped. She mostly talked to Graham, but still, it would have been nice to know – it could have been something for us to connect on. Kate never has talked to me about her relationships though, so why should I have expected her to start now? It just – him coming all the way from

England here to visit us for the holidays? That's serious. And she's, well she isn't old, but she is the marrying age and I'm sure she's thought about it – maybe not with him, but maybe. He's definitely dashing, mysterious and dark. But I am sworn to dislike him until he proves himself useful – although all before and during dinner he asked if he could help set the table and seemed personable enough at the table. I might like him after all. And after all, she is my daughter, I raised her and I know I did a good job – a PhD in mathematics? Seems crazy – because it is – but also incredible, I don't know anyone else who's daughter is one of the leading mathematicians or leading anything in her field, except for maybe Gina's daughter, Emoeba, I mean Emmeebee (short for Emily Beatrice, ugh what a terrible name! All these names today – first Bryenne for a boy and again poor Emmeebee – she needs to move somewhere very, very southern) who I hear is the top salesgirl at Bergdorf's – I'm glad someone can persuade people with mountainous amounts of disposable income to buy things. Lord knows it's a chore.

So he seems like a nice enough man, I'm not really a fan of the long hair, I think he'd look a lot better with it cut, but I shouldn't be talking, Graham was really trying for a pony tail when I first met him, big mistake which was rectified after I refused the initial date – I'm not saying I'm shallow when it comes to physical attraction, but I'm not saying I'm not, good thing I don't have to worry about that anymore – Inigo, yes, he could be very good. I won't pass judgement, I don't know him very well right now, but I am happy that he can be here to celebrate these days with us. I hope we get past tonight, though.

I'm not worried, not really, not more than usual. It's just, weird, you know? Ever since the whole “Mayan Apocolypse” thing came out in 2010 and then the Arab Spring and the Malian coup earlier this year and the tsunami that ravaged Thailand last month, global warming – there are so many things that have happened over the past two years, mostly in this past year, to suggest a change in the current world order. Maybe that is what change it – but we have something to blame now, we have a name and an event or a people who predicted the end of this life as we know it. It is certainly the end of my life as I know it.

I can hear Inigo laughing in the next room, Katherine I'm sure will fall for him or the next guy, and she'll be married soon, she's ready I can sense it. Then I'll eventually have grandchildren, my God, I don't want to think about that, I guess I'd prefer Grams or Grammie, I don't know I was just hoping the kid would decide and I would go with whatever he or she uttered when facing me. Silas is going away to college, I don't know where, but not having any children around will make the house feel very empty. Graham and I have spent so much of our relationship basing ourselves and defining ourselves by our family, by what our kids are up to or where they need to be at what time and with whom – I'm a little apprehensive about going back to it being just the two of us. What did we used to do for fun before playdough or walking the dog or playing soccer in the yard? Did we go out in the city, we must have, I guess we'll be going out to shows or something. We don't have to sneak sex anymore, I won't be disturbed in the morning between the time Graham leaves and I leave for work. No more dinners for six plus people, oh I hadn't thought of that, I'm not too good cooking for just two at home. At the restaurant, sure, but at home – it just never feels right. Then Freddy – who knows what he will do? Probably go back to

Florence and live and experience things that he was meant to. If there was an occupation for exploring, that is what he would do. He'll find something, it is hard for me to stand by and be mad and try to make him seek more responsibility for his life. But I can't, I don't pay his bills and he is doing exactly what he should be doing – living. If the world order is about to change, perhaps it will be for the better. Here we are worried about change, but what if the change could be good. This life isn't all it's cracked up to be, at times it's better but a lot more of the time it is less. I shouldn't be talking or thinking like this, I have everything I need and more. Sometimes I get depressed and it is just like it says in the commercials with the sad yellow two-dimensional circle/ball - “depression hurts.” I have everything and yet I still feel like something is missing or like something isn't right. I just don't know what it is. Maybe I am just tired and need sleep. Or maybe what I read everyday on Facebook versus on the mobile version of the Times, because who would have thought it would have gone out of print so soon? nearly sickens me. I can't go to museums anymore because I get so upset by kids playing on ancient artifacts with their parents watching and not caring. How can you possibly not care? How can you be dense enough not to realize that this NYC museum, yes the one(s) with the famous paintings, is *not* a please-touch-museum. Those are petting zoos – go to the zoo. Or get a book with different animals' fur in it and you can stroke the pretty lion all you want. Jesu, I'm working myself up. I wonder what they're all watching in there, it sounds like the news. Or maybe just a parody of the News, the Colbert Report or an SNL rerun of World Report. I can't make it out. After menopause, my hearing has started to go. The two are probably not mutually exclusive but I like to think it wasn't all the headbanging I did in my 20s that is causing me to go prematurely deaf. I'd like to think that, and then again, I'd like to think a lot of things that aren't true. Oh I caught something about some social media platform going bankrupt – I wonder what would happen to all the information that could be on that site, all the people it would literally destroy – missing pictures, a “timeline” of their “activity” in case they forget where they went or what they were doing, address books, past dates, the false glimmer that you are actually connected with 500 to 1,000 other people by more than just a click of the trackpad. But I'm the skeptical New Yorker here. Reporting for duty.

Would I be sad if this life ended right now? I'm not sure what made me think of that but to answer the “traditional” fate of apocalyptic movies and books, what would happen if this no longer existed. I like to say - “well I wouldn't know, now would I? I wouldn't be here to experience it” but even looking from above, that is if heaven is real and if I would get in. College admissions weren't that easy, the past 20 years of judgements less so - I can't imagine Heaven being any less difficult, the market for divine real estate never slumps.

I don't know the answer to that question. I would have to believe that I've done what I wanted to or at least succeeded in the pursuit of my goals. What if I never reached any of my goals but spent my entire life reaching for them – would I consider this life “good” or “happy?” Maybe. I could see that positively. It's almost like missing the moon but ending up in the milk way galaxy surrounded by interstellar dust particles, stars and nebulae of intense color and depth. As long as it is my path and I am helping anyone who asks for my help stay on their path, then I would be okay with this being that last day of my mortal life. Because what is mortality anyways? I am washing dishes, dreaming and drinking, the suds are up past my elbows – how I prefer it – and I

don't have to think about next month's bill because I paid this month's yesterday and put it in the mail today. I'm not worried about tomorrow, as long as my now is taken care of and everyone in my family is comfortable and well, then I have done my job here on this good, good Earth. The great thing is – I don't think it's the “end of the world,” I think it is only the beginning.

When else in history have we been given a get out of jail free card? A real one? In the movies, there are always scenes where people confess their undying love or a secret that has been holding them back and it is at the end when they're convinced they're going to die that they let go and fess up. I imagine that will be happening all over the world tonight. Couples will break up and get together because of confessions, some will win respect and others will lose it as we unload our emotional carry-on and personal item, followed by one checked bag, \$35.

It is only after confession, when we are cleansed of our sins, that we begin again. And we always begin again. It is the natural order of things.

That's what I think. I think we're all just waiting for something – the actor's big break, the chairman to step down and give us his position at the firm, the CEO to die on a freak accident on his caribbean yacht. Maybe not that last example. But I'm standing here washing the dishes and a part of me can't believe that this morning, the Times published Pete Wells' article about my restaurant which was an unbelievably rave review of Avelino+Bloome that might actually amount to a little bit of personal fame and secure some sort of financial future for my family and the restaurant. I mean, it is a fantastic place and totally self-sustainable and I knew that and Graham knew that but it wasn't until Pete wrote about it and I saw it in print on my iPad and then in the actual paper version around the corner at Balthazar's later as I went for an afternoon espresso and to walk around a bit (Susanne could have made it for me but I like to get out and be inspired by the city instead of cooped up in my kitchen all day, I think it's so important for chefs to understand themselves and their thinking I remember feeling so anxious I felt like I had cabin fever the first few months I was working under Chef Corah in Chicago I didn't realize it was just because too much of a great thing and my mind needed a break from the thing I loved the most otherwise I was going to get debilitatingly frustrated and make mistakes and say things I didn't mean. So I founded my habit of spending a little time each day to just not think but to use only my senses to sense and not perceive.) But back to the issue at hand. Now that all the cookware is finished, I can start loading the dishwasher – best. Invention. Ever. Second to the toaster oven.

I think we're all just waiting. What are we waiting for in this life? For somebody to look at us and say – you're a star, come with me. For someone else to take control of our lives for us? For an impending doom such that may or may not arrive in the next four hours? Is this what we've been reduced to, to actually fight for the things we want or to figure out what those things are? They say tomorrow never comes...until it does. We wait until tomorrow to take ahold of the life we are living today. We keep our mouths closed firmly until the moment of silence has passed and our thought is lost in the noise of humanity.

After confession, when we are cleansed of our sins, we begin again. Do we? We begin again because we are given the chance, the opportunity, to step onto the sidewalk outside the church and walk home. We cannot keep from sinning, it is the natural order of things. But we can keep from taking this for granted. THIS, whatever it is, whatever we make of it, is ours.

And you only live onc-



The End.